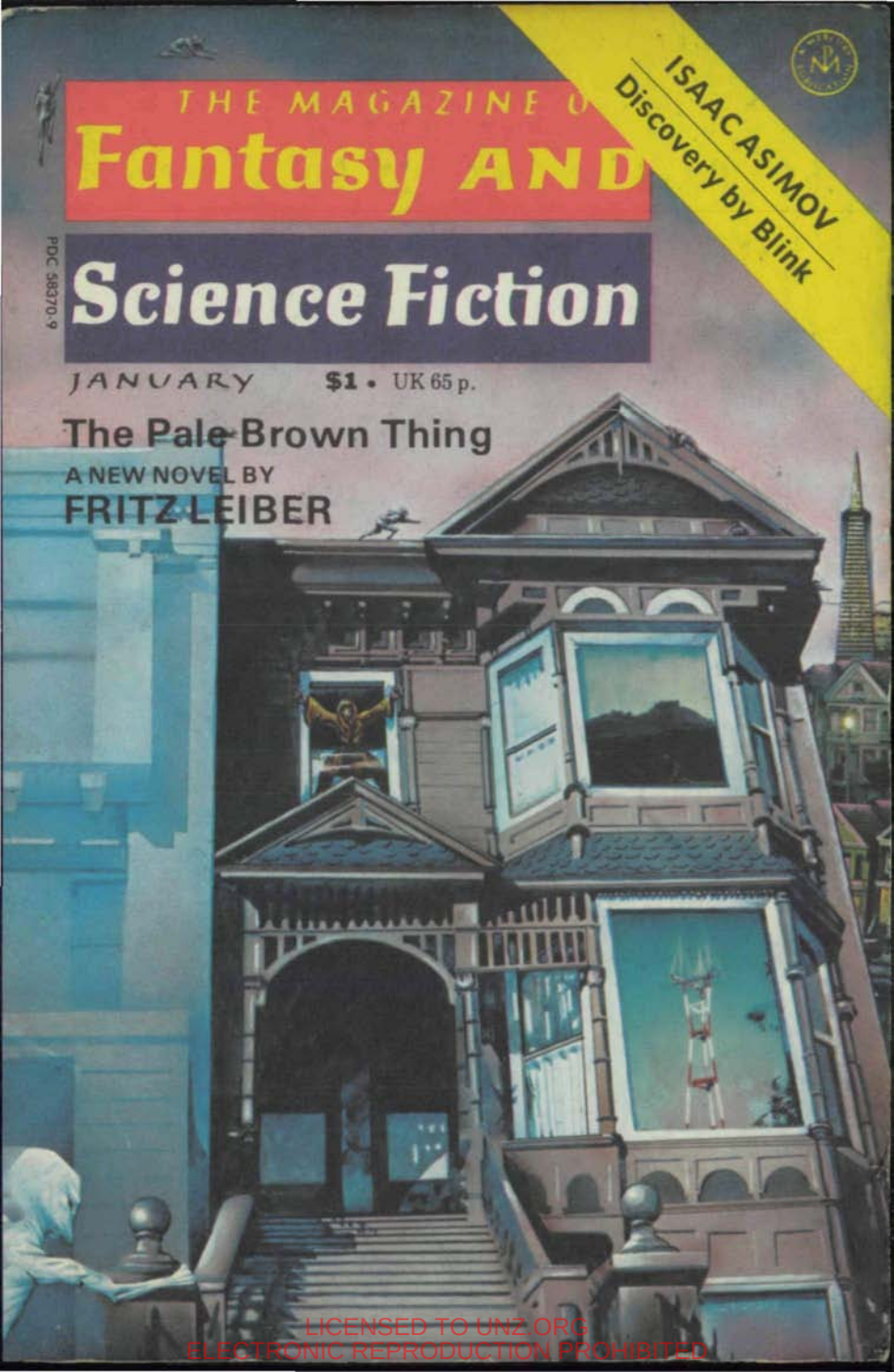

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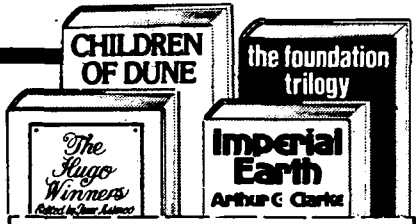

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The Pale Brown Thing

(1st of 2 parts)

by FRITZ LEIBER

Part I

The solitary steep hill called Corona Heights was black as pitch and very silent, like the heart of the unknown. It looked steadily downward and away at the nervous bright lights of downtown, as if it were a great predatory beast of night surveying its territory in patient search of prey.

On every side of Corona Heights the street and house lights of San Francisco, weakest at end of night, hemmed it in apprehensively, as if it were indeed a dangerous animal. But on the hill itself there was not a single light.

Someday the hill might be bulldozed down, when greed had grown even greater than it is today and awe of primeval nature even less, but now it could still awaken panic terror.

Too savage and cantankerous for a park, it was inadequately designated as a playground. True, there were some tennis courts and limited fields of grass and low buildings and little stands of thick pine around its base, but above those it rose rough, naked, and contemptuously aloof.

And now something seemed to stir in the massed darkness there. Hard to tell what. Perhaps one or more of the city's wild dogs, homeless for generations. Perhaps some wilder and more secret animal that had never submitted to man's rule, yet lived almost unglimpsed amongst him. Perhaps, conceivably, a man (or woman) so sunk in savagery or psychosis that he (or she) didn't need light. Or perhaps only the wind.

And now the eastern horizon grew dark red, the whole sky lightened from the east toward the west, the stars were fading, and Corona Heights began to show its raw, dry, pale-brown surface.

Yet the impression lingered that

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the hill had grown restless, having at last decided on its victim.

Two hours later, Franz Westen looked out of his open casement window at the 1,200-foot TV tower rising bright red and white in the morning sunlight out of the snowy fog that still masked Sutro Crest and Twin Peaks three miles away (and against which Corona Heights stood out, humped and pale brown). It was his morning greeting to the universe, his affirmation that they were in touch, before making coffee and settling back into bed with clipboard and pad for the day's work of writing supernatural horror stories. A year or so ago — that was another matter.

Dancing up the sea air into his room, there came the gay sweet notes of Telemann minuet blown by Cal from her recorder two floors below. She meant them for him, he told himself, even though he was twenty years older. He looked at the oil portrait of Daisy over the studio bed, beside a drawing of the TV tower in spidery black lines on a large oblong or fluorescent red cardboard, and felt no guilt. Three years of drunken grief — a record wake! — had worked that all away, ending almost exactly a year ago.

His gaze dropped to the studio bed, still half unmade. On the undisturbed half, nearest the wall, there stretched out a long colorful scatter of magazines, science-fiction paperbacks, a few hardcover detective novels still in their wrappers, and a half dozen of those shiny little Golden Guides and Knowledge Through Color books — his recreational reading as opposed to his working references arranged on the coffee table beside the bed. They'd been his chief, almost his sole companions during the three years he'd lain sodden there stupidly goggling at the TV across the room, but always fingering them and stupefiedly studying their bright easy pages from time to time. Only a month or so ago it had suddenly occurred to him that their gay casual scatter added up to a slender carefree woman lying beside him on top of the covers — that was why he never put them on the floor, why he contented himself with half the bed, why he unconsciously arranged them in a female form with long, long legs. They were a "scholar's mistress," he decided, on the analogy of "Dutch wife," that long slender bolster sleepers clutch to soak up sweat in tropical countries — a very secret playmate, a dashing but studious call girl, a slim incestuous sister, eternal comrade of his writing work.

With an affectionate glance toward his oil-painted dead wife and a keen warm thought toward Cal still sending up on the air pirouetting notes, he said softly

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with a conspiratorial smile to the slender cubist form occupying all the inside of the bed, "Don't worry, dear, you'll always be my best girl, though we'll have to keep it a deep secret from the others," and turned back to the window.

It was the TV tower standing way out there so modern tall on Sutro Crest, its three long legs still deep in fog, that had first got him hooked on reality again after his long escape in drunken dreams. At the beginning the tower had seemed unbelievably cheap and garish to him, an intrusion worse than the high rises in what had been the most romantic of cities. But then it had begun to impress him against his will with its winking red lights at night — so many of them! he had counted nineteen — and then it had subtly led his interest to the other distances in the cityscape and also in the real stars so far beyond and on lucky nights the moon, until he had got passionately interested in all real things again. And the process had never stopped, it still kept on. Until Saul had said to him, "I don't know about welcoming in every new reality. You could run into a bad customer."

"That's fine talk, coming from a clinical psychologist," Gunnar had said, while Franz had responded instantly: "Taken for granted. Concentration camps. Germs of plague."

"I don't mean things like those exactly," Saul had said. "I guess I mean the sort of things some of my guys run into at the hospital."

"But those would be hallucinations, projections, archetypes, and so on, wouldn't they?" Franz had observed, a little wonderingly. "Parts of *inner* reality, of course."

"Sometimes I'm not so sure," Saul had said slowly. "Who's going to believe a crazy if he says he's just seen a ghost? Inner or outer reality? Who's to tell then? What do you say, Gunnar, when one of your computers starts giving read-outs it shouldn't?"

"That it's got overheated," Gun had answered with conviction. "Besides, my computers are normal people to start out with, not weirdos and psychotics like your guys."

Franz had smiled at his two friends; Cal had smiled too, though not so much.

Now he looked out the window again. Just outside it, the six-story drop went down past Cal's window — a narrow shaft between this building and the next, the flat roof of which was about level with his floor. Just beyond that, framing his view to either side, were the bone-white, rain-stained back walls, mostly windowless, of two high rises that went up and up.

It was a rather narrow slot between them, but through it he could see all of reality he needed to

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keep in touch. And if he wanted more he could always go up two stories to the roof, which he often did these days and nights.

From this building low on Nob Hill the sea of roofs went down and down, then up and up again, tinying with distance, to the bank of fog now masking the dark-green slope of Sutro Crest and the bottom of the tripod TV tower. But in the middle distance a shape like a crouching breast, pale brown in the morning sunlight, rose from the sea of roofs. The map called it just Corona Heights. It had been teasing Franz's curiosity for several weeks. Now he focused his small, seven-power Nikon binoculars on its bare earth slopes and humped spine, which stood out sharply against the white fog. Could it be called Corona Heights from the crown of irregularly clumped big rocks on its top? he asked himself as he rotated the knurled knob a little more, and they came out momentarily sharp and clear against the fog.

A rather thin, pale-brown rock detached itself from the others and waved at him. Damn the way these glasses jiggled with his heartbeat! A person who expected to see neat steady pictures through them just hadn't used binoculars. Or could it be a floater in his vision? — a microscopic speck in the eye's fluid? There he had it again! Just as he'd thought, it was some tall person in a long raincoat or drab robe moving about almost as if dancing. You couldn't see human figures in any detail at two miles even with sevenfold magnification; you just got a general impression of movements and attitude. They were simplified. This skinny figure on Corona Heights was moving around rather rapidly, all right, maybe dancing with arms waving high, but that was the most you could tell.

As he lowered the binoculars, he smiled broadly at the thought of some hippy type greeting the morning sun with ritual prancings on a midcity hilltop newly emerged from fog. Someone from the Haight-Ashbury, likely, it was out that way. A stoned priest of a modern sun god dancing around his little accidental high-set Stonehenge. The thing had given him a start at first, but now he found it very amusing.

He set down the binoculars on his desk beside two old thin books. The topmost, bound in dirty gray, was open at its title page, which read in a utilitarian type face and layout marking it as last century's — a grimy job by a grimy printer with no thought of artistry: *Megapolisomancy: A New Science of Cities* by Thibaut de Castries. Now that was a funny coincidence! He wondered if a drug-crazed priest in earthen robes — or a dancing rock, for that matter! — would have been

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recognized by that strange old crackpot Thibaut as one of the "secret occurrences" he had predicted for big cities in the solemnly straight-faced book he'd written when he was relatively young in the 1890s. Franz told himself that he must read some more in it, and in the other book too.

But not right now, he told himself suddenly. He'd just remembered that today was a holiday for him (last night he'd sent two stories to his agent), and he was beginning to get an idea of what to do with it. He got dressed, made himself a cup of coffee, and carried it down to Cal's — and on an afterthought the two books under his arm and the binoculars in his coat pocket.

It was one of those times when Cal looked like a serious schoolgirl of seventeen, lightly wrapped in dreams, and not ten years older, her actual age. Long dark hair, blue eyes, a quiet smile. They'd been to bed together twice, but didn't kiss now — it might have seemed presumptuous on his part, she didn't quite offer to, and in any case he wasn't sure how far he wanted to commit himself. She invited him in to the breakfast she was making. Her room looked much nicer than his, too good for the building; she had redecorated it completely with help from Gunnar and Saul. Only it didn't have a view. There was a music stand by the window and an electronic piano that was mostly keyboard and black box and that had earphones for silent practicing, as well as a speaker.

They ate toast, juice and eggs. While she was pouring him more coffee, he said, "I've got a great idea. Let's go to Corona Heights today. I think there'd be a great view of downtown and the inner bay. We could take the Muni most of the way and there shouldn't be too much climbing."

"You forget I've got to practice for the concert tomorrow night and couldn't risk my hands in any case," she said a shade reproachfully. "But don't let that stop you," she added with a smile that asked his pardon. "Why not ask Gun or Saul, I think they're off today. Gun's great on climbing. Where is Corona Heights?"

He told her, remembering that her interest in Frisco was neither as new nor as passionate as his — he had a convert's zeal.

"That must be close to Buena Vista Park," she said. "Now don't go wandering in there, please. There've been some murders in there quite recently. Drug related. The other side of Buena Vista is right up against the Haight."

"I don't intend to," he said, "though maybe you're a little too uptight about the Haight. It's

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quieted down a lot the last few years. Why, I got these two books there in a really fabulous second-hand store."

"Oh, yes, you were going to show them to me," she said.

He handed her the one that had been open, saying, "That's just about the most fascinating book of pseudo science I've ever seen — it has some genuine insights mixed with the hokum. No date, but printed about 1900, I'd judge."

"'Megapolisomancy,'" she pronounced carefully. "Now what would that be? Telling the future from...from cities?"

"From *big* cities," he said, nodding.

"Oh, yes, the mega."

He went on: "Telling the future and all other sorts of things. And apparently making magic too from that knowledge. Though de Castries calls it 'a new science,' as if he were a second Galileo. Anyhow, this de Castries is very much concerned about the 'vast amounts' of steel and paper that are being accumulated in big cities. And coal oil (kerosene) and natural gas. And electricity too, if you can believe it — he carefully figures out just how much electricity is in how many thousands of miles of wire, how many tons of illuminating gas in tanks, how much steel in the new skyscrapers, how much paper for government records and yellow journalism, and so on."

"My, oh, my," Cal commented. "I wonder what he'd think if he were alive today."

"His direst predictions vindicated no doubt. He *did* speculate about the growing menace of automobiles and gasoline, but especially electric cars carrying buckets of direct electricity around in batteries. He came so close to anticipating our modern concern about pollution — he even talks of 'the vast congeries of gigantic fuming vats' of sulfuric acid needed to manufacture steel. But what he was agitated about was the psychological or spiritual (he calls them 'paramental') effects of all that stuff accumulating in big cities, its sheer liquid and solid mass."

"A real proto-hippy," Cal put it. "What's with the other book?"

"Something quite interesting," Franz said, passing it over. "As you can see, it's not a regular book at all but a journal of blank rice-paper pages, as thin as onion skin but more opaque, bound in ribbed silk that was tea rose, I'd say, before it faded. The entries, in violet ink with a fine-point fountain pen, I'd guess, hardly go a quarter of the way through. The rest of the pages are blank. Now when I bought these books they were tied together with an old piece of string. They looked like they'd been joined for

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decades — you can still see the marks."

"Uh-huh," Cal agreed. "Since 1900 or so? A very charming diary book — I'd like to have one like it."

"Yes, isn't it? No, just since 1928. A couple of the entries are dated and they all seem to have been made in the space of a few weeks."

"Was he a poet?" Cal asked. "I see groups of indented lines. Who was he, anyway? Old de Castries?"

"No, not de Castries, though someone who had read his book and knew him. But I do think he was a poet. In fact, I think I have identified the writer, though it's not easy to prove since he nowhere signs himself. I think he was Clark Ashton Smith."

"I've heard that name," Cal said.

"Probably from me," Franz told her. "He was another supernatural horror writer. Very rich, doomful stuff: Arabian Nights chinoiserie. A mood like Beddoes' *Death's Jest-Book*. He lived near San Francisco and knew the old artistic crew; he visited George Sterling at Carmel, and he could easily have been here in San Francisco in 1928 when he'd just begun to write his finest stories. I've given a photocopy of that journal to Jaime Donaldus Byers, who's an authority on Smith and who lives here on Beaver Street (which is just by Corona Heights, by the way — the map shows it). Byers says there's no evidence for an extended San Francisco trip by Smith then and that although the writing looks like Smith's, it's more agitated than any he's ever seen. But I have reasons to think Smith would have kept the trip secret and have had cause to be supremely agitated."

"Oh, my," Cal said. "You've gone to a lot of trouble and thought about it. But I can see why. It's *tres romantique*, just the feel of this ribbed silk and rice paper."

"I had a special reason," Franz said, unconsciously dropping his voice a little. "I bought the books four years ago, you see, before I moved here, and I read a lot of the journal. The violet-ink person (whoever, *I* think Smith) keeps writing about 'visiting Tiberius at 607 Rhodes.' In fact, the journal is entirely, or chiefly, an account of a series of such interviews. That '607 Rhodes' stuck in my mind, so that when I went hunting a cheaper place to live and was shown the room here—"

"Of course, it's your apartment number, 607," Cal interrupted.

Franz nodded. "I got the idea it was predestined, or prearranged in some mysterious way. As if I'd had to look for the '607 Rhodes' and had found it. I had a lot of mysterious drunken ideas in those days. In fact, I was pretty drunk

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most of the time, period."

"You certainly were," Cal agreed, "though in a quiet way. Saul and Gun and I wondered about you, and we pumped Dorotea Luque," she added, referring to the Peruvian apartment manager. "Even then, you didn't seem an ordinary lush. Dorotea said you wrote *'ficcion* to scare, about *espectros y fantasmas y los muertos y las muertas,'* but that she thought you were a gentleman."

Franz laughed. "Specters and phantoms of dead men and dead ladies. How very Spanish! Still, I'll bet you never thought—" he began and stopped.

"That I'd some day get into bed with you?" Cal finished for him. "Don't be too sure. I've always had erotic fantasies about older men. But tell me, how did your weird then-brain fit in the Rhodes part?"

"It never did," Franz confessed. "Though I still think the violet-ink person had some definite place in mind, besides the obvious reference to Tiberius' exile by Augustus to the island of Rhodes, where the Roman emperor-to-be studied oratory along with sexual perversion and a spot of witchcraft. The violet-ink person doesn't always say Tiberius, incidentally. It's sometimes Theobald and sometimes Tybalt, and once it's Thrasyllus, who was Tiberius' personal fortuneteller and sorcerer. But always there's that '607 Rhodes.' And once it's Theudebaldo and once Dietbold, but three times Thibaut, which is what makes me sure, besides all the other things, it must have been de Castries whom Smith was visiting almost every day and writing about."

"Franz," Cal said, "all this is perfectly fascinating, but I've just got to start practicing. Working up harpsichord on a dinky electronic piano is hard enough, and tomorrow night's not just anything, it's the Fifth Brandenburg Concerto."

"I know, I'm sorry I forgot about it. It was inconsiderate of me, a male chauvinist—" Franz began, getting to his feet.

"Now don't get tragic," Cal said briskly. "I enjoyed every minute, really, but now I've got to work. Here, take your cup and for heaven's sake these books, or I'll be peeking into them when I should be practicing. Cheer up — at least you're not a male chauvinist pig, you only ate one piece of toast.

"And, Franz," she called. He turned with his things at the door. "Do be careful up there around Beaver and Buena Vista. Take Gun or Saul. And remember—" Instead of saying what, she kissed two fingers and held them out toward him for a moment, looking quite solemnly into his eyes.

He smiled, nodded twice, and went out feeling happy and excited.

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He passed the elevator, although the cage was still there, and the strange black window beside it, and he climbed the red-carpeted stairs. He didn't stop at Gun and Saul's floor, however. He mightn't go to Corona Heights at all, but he wouldn't ask either of them to come with him — it was a question of courage, or at least independence.

He didn't stop at his own floor, either, but kept on toward the roof, glimpsing at each landing more of the strange black windows that couldn't be opened and a few black doors without knobs in the empty red-carpeted halls. It was odd how buildings had secret spaces in them that weren't really hidden but were never noticed, like the windows to the five air shafts which had been painted black at some time to hide their dinginess, and the doors to the disused broom closets, which had lost their function with the passing of cheap maid service. He doubted anyone in the building ever consciously saw them, except himself, newly aroused to reality by the tower and all.

He passed through the cubical room housing the elevator's motor and noisy, old-fashioned mechanical relays, and he stepped out onto the flat, rather low-walled roof, its tar-embedded gravel gritting faintly under his shoes. The cool breeze was welcome.

To the east and north bulked the huge downtown buildings and whatever secret spaces they contained, blocking off the Bay. How old Thibaut would have scowled at the Transamerica Pyramid and the purple-brown Bank of America monster! Even at the new Hilton and St. Francis towers. The words came into his head: "The ancient Egyptians only buried people in their pyramids. We are living in ours." Now where had he read that? Why, in *Megapolisomancy,* of course. How apt! And did the modern pyramids have in them secret markings foretelling the future and crypts for sorcery?

He walked past the low-walled openings of the narrow air shafts lined with gray sheet iron, to the back of the roof and looked up between the nearby high rises (modest compared with those downtown) at the TV tower and Corona Heights. The fog was gone, but the pale irregular hump of the latter still stood out sharply in the morning sunlight. He looked through his binoculars, not very hopefully, but — yes, by God! — there was that crazy drab worshipper, or what not, still busy with his ritual, or whatever. If these glasses would just settle down! Now the fellow had run to a slightly lower clump of rocks and seemed to be peering furtively over it. Franz followed the apparent direction of his gaze down the crest and almost

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immediately came to its probable object: two hikers trudging up. Because of their colorful shorts and shirts, it was easier to make them out. Yet despite their flamboyant garb they somehow struck Franz as more respectable characters than the lurker at the summit. He wondered what would happen when they met at the top. Would the robed hierophant try to convert them? Or solemnly warn them off? Or stop them like the Ancient Mariner and tell them an eerie story with a moral? Franz looked back, but now the fellow (or could it have been a woman?) was gone. A shy type, evidently. He searched the rocks, trying to spot him hiding, and even followed the plodding hikers until they reached the top and disappeared on the other side, hoping for a surprise encounter, but none came.

Nevertheless, when he shoved the binoculars back in his pocket, he had made up his mind. He'd visit Corona Heights. It was too good a day to stay indoors.

"If you won't come to me, then I will come to you," he said aloud, quoting an eerie bit from a Montague Rhodes James ghost story.

An hour afterwards he was climbing Beaver Street, taking deep breaths to avoid panting later. When he'd started, he'd had his binoculars hanging around his neck on their strap like a storybook adventurer's, so that Dorotea Luque, waiting in the lobby with a couple of elderly tenants for the mailman, had observed merrily, "You go to look for the e-scary thing to write e-stories about, no?" and he had replied, *"Si, Senora Luque. Espectros y fantasmas,"* in what he hoped was equally cockeyed Spanish. But then a block or so back, a bit after getting off the Muni car on Market, he'd wedged them into his pocket again, alongside the street guide he'd brought. This seemed a nice-enough neighborhood, quite safe-looking, really. Still, there was no point in displaying advertisements of affluence.

Actually there were relatively few people in the streets this morning. At the moment he couldn't see a single one. His mind toyed briefly with the notion of a big modern city suddenly completely deserted, like the barque the *Marie Celeste.*

He went by Jaime Donaldus Byers' place, a narrow-fronted piece of carpenter's Gothic now painted olive with gold trim, very Old San Francisco. Perhaps he'd chance ringing the bell coming back.

From here he couldn't see Corona Heights at all. Nearby stuff masked it (and the TV tower too). Conspicuous at a distance, it had hidden itself like a pale brown tiger on his approach, so that he had to

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get out his street guide and spread its map to make sure he hadn't got off the track.

At last he came out on a short dead-end cross street behind some new apartments. At its other end a sedan was parked with two people sitting in the front seats — then he saw that he'd mistaken headrests for heads. They did look so like dark little tombstones!

On the other side of the cross street were no more buildings, but green and brown terraces going up to an irregular crest against blue sky. He saw he'd finally reached Corona Heights, somewhat on the far side from his apartment.

After a leisurely cigarette, he mounted steadily past some tennis courts and up a winding hillside stairway and emerged on another dead-end street, or road, rather. He felt very good, really, in the outdoors. Gazing back the way he'd come, he saw the TV tower looking enormous (and handsomer than ever) less than a mile away, yet somehow just the right size. After a moment he realized that was because it was now the same size his binoculars magnified it to from his apartment.

Strolling to the dead end of the road, he passed a long, rambling one-story brick building with generous parking space that modestly identified itself as the Josephine Randall Junior Museum. There was a panel truck with the homely label *Sidewalk Astronomer.* He recalled hearing of it from Dorotea Luque's daughter Bonita as the place where children could bring pet tame squirrels and snakes and brindled Japanese rats (and bats?) when for some reason they could no longer keep them. He also realized he'd seen its low roofs from his window.

From the dead end, a short path led him to the foot of the crest, and there on the other side was all the eastern half of San Francisco and the Bay beyond and both the bridges spread out before him.

Resolutely resisting the urge to scan in detail, he set himself to mounting the ridge by the hard, gravelly path near its crest. This soon became rather tiresome. He had to pause more than once for breath and set his feet carefully to keep from slipping.

When he'd about reached the spot where he'd first seen the hikers, he suddenly realized that he'd grown rather childishly apprehensive. He was pausing now not so much for breath as to scan very carefully each rock clump before circling by it, for if he thrust his head too trustingly around one, what face or no-face might he not see?

This really was too childish of him, he told himself. Didn't he want to meet the character on the summit and find out just what sort

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of an oddball he was? A gentle soul, most likely, from his simple garb and timidity and love of solitude. Though of course he most likely had departed by now.

Nevertheless Franz kept using his eyes systematically as he mounted the last of the slope, gentler now, to its top.

The ultimate outcropping of rocks (the Corona?) was more extensive and higher than the others. After holding back a bit (to spy out the best route, he told himself) he mounted by three ledges, each of which required a leg-stretching step, to the very top, where he at last stood up with all of Corona Heights beneath him.

He slowly turned around in a full circle, tracing the horizon but scanning very thoroughly all the clumps of rock and all the brown and green slopes immediately below him, familiarizing himself with his new surroundings and incidentally ascertaining that there wasn't another being besides himself anywhere on Corona Heights.

Then he went down a couple of ledges and settled himself comfortably in a natural rock seat facing east. He felt very much at ease and remarkably secure in this eyrie, especially with the sense of the mighty TV tower rising behind him like a protective goddess. While smoking another leisurely cigarette, he surveyed with unaided eyes the great spread of the city and bay, with its great ships tinier than toys. It was interesting how landmarks shifted with his new vantage point. Compared with his view from the roof, some of the downtown buildings had shot up, while others seemed trying to hide behind their neighbors.

After another cigarette he got out his binoculars and put their strap around his neck and began to study this and that. They were quite steady now, not like this morning.

After a survey of the steely, gleaming inner waters and following the Bay Bridge all the way to Oakland, he set in seriously on the downtown buildings and soon discovered to his embarrassment that they were quite hard to identify from here. Distance and perspective had subtly altered their hues and arrangement. And, then, contemporary skyscrapers were so very anonymous — no signs or names, no pinnacle statues or weathercocks or crosses, no distinctive facades and cornices, no architectural ornament at all: just huge blank slabs of featureless stone, or concrete, or glass that was either sleekly bright with sun or dark with shadow. Really, they might well be the "gargantuan tombs or monstrous vertical coffins of living humanity, a breeding ground for the worst of paramental entities" that old de Castries had

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kept ranting about in his book.

After another stretch of telescopic study, in which he managed to identify a couple of the shifty skycrapers at least, he let his binoculars hang and got out from his other pocket the meat sandwich he'd made himself. As he unwrapped and slowly ate it, he thought of what a fortunate person he really was. A year ago he'd been a mess, but now—

He heard a *scrutch* of gravel, then another. He looked around but didn't see anything. He couldn't decide from what direction the faint sounds had come. The sandwich was dry in his mouth.

With an effort he swallowed and continued eating and recaptured his train of thought. Yes, now he had friends like Gun and Saul... and Cal...and his health was a damn sight better—

Another *scrutch*, louder, and with it an odd little high-pitched laugh. He tensed himself and looked around quickly, sandwich and thoughts forgotten.

There came the laugh again, mounting toward a shrill shriek, and from behind the rocks there came dashing, along the path just below, two little girls in dark-blue play clothes. The one caught the other and they spun around, squealing happily, in a whirl of sun-browned limbs and fair hair.

Franz had barely time to think what a refutation this was of Cal's (and his own) worries about this area, and for the afterthought that still it didn't seem right for parents to let such small, attractive girls (they couldn't be more than seven or eight) ramble in such a lonely place, when there came loping from behind the rocks a shaggy St. Bernard, whom the girls at once pulled into their whirling game. But after only a little more of that, they ran on along the path by which Franz had come up, their large protecor close behind. He smiled. His sandwich no longer tasted dry.

He crumpled the wax paper into a ball and stuck it in his pocket. The sun was already westering and striking the distant tall walls confronting him. His trip and climb had taken longer than he'd realized, and he'd been sitting here longer too. What was that epitaph Dorothy Sayers had seen on an old tombstone and thought the acme of all grue? Oh, yes: "It is later than you think." They'd made a popular song of that just before World War II: "Enjoy yourself, enjoy yourself, it's later than you think." There was shivery irony for you! But he had lots of time.

He got busy with his binoculars again, studying the medieval greenish brown cap of the Mark Hopkins Hotel housing the restaurant-bar Top of the Mark. An obviously pleasant task occurred to

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him: to spot his own seven-story apartment house. From his window he could see Corona Heights. Ergo, from Corona Heights he could see his window. It would be in a narrow slot between two high rises, he reminded himself, but the sun would be striking into that slot by now, giving good illumination.

To his chagrin, it proved extremely difficult. From here the lesser roofs were almost a trackless sea, literally, and such a foreshortened one that it was very hard to trace the lines of streets — a checkerboard viewed from the edge. The job preoccupied him so that he became oblivious of his immediate surroundings. If the little girls had returned now and stared up at him, he probably wouldn't have noticed them. Yet the silly little problem he'd set himself was so puzzling that more than once he almost gave it up.

Really, a city's roofs were a whole dark alien world of their own, unsuspected by the myriad dwellers below, and with their own inhabitants, no doubt, their own ghosts and "paramental entities."

But he rose to the challenge, and with the help of a couple of familiar watertanks he knew to be on roofs close to his and of a sign BEDFORD HOTEL painted in big black letters high on the side wall of that nearby building, he at last identified his apartment house.

He was wholly engrossed in his task.

Yes, there was the slot, by God! — and there was his own window, the second from the top, very tiny but distinct in the sunlight. Lucky he'd spotted it now — the shadow traveling across the wall would soon obscure it.

And then his hands were suddenly shaking so that he'd dropped his binoculars. Only the strap kept them from crashing on the rocks.

A pale brown shape had leaned out of his window and waved at him.

What was going through his head was a couple of lines from that bit of silly folk doggerel which begins:

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief.

Taffy came to my house and stole a piece of beef.

But it was the ending that was repeating itself in his head:

I went to Taffy's house, Taffy wasn't home.

Taffy went to my house and stole a marrow bone.

Now for God's sake don't get so excited, he told himself, taking hold of the dangling binoculars and raising them again. And stop breathing so hard, you haven't been running.

He was some time locating his building and the slot again — damn the dark sea of roofs! — but

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when he did, there was the shape again in his window. Pale brown, like old bones — now don't get morbid! It could be the drapes, he told himself, half blown out of his window by the wind — he'd left it open. Among high buildings there were freakish winds. His drapes were green, of course, but their lining was a nondescript hue like this. And the figure wasn't waving to him now — its dancing was that of the binoculars — but rather regarding him thoughtfully, as if saying, "You chose to visit my place, Mr. Westen; so I decided to make use of that opportunity to have a quiet look at yours." Quit it! he told himself. The last thing we need now is a writer's imagination.

He lowered his binoculars to give his heartbeat a chance to settle down and to work his cramped fingers. Suddenly anger filled him. In his fantasizing he'd lost sight of the plain fact that someone was mucking about in his room! But who? Dorotea Luque had a master key, of course, but she was never a bit sneaky, nor her grave brother Fernando, who did the janitor work and had hardly any English at all but played a remarkably strong game of chess. Franz had given his own duplicate key to Gun a week ago — a matter of a parcel to be delivered while he was out — and hadn't got it back. Which meant that either Gun or Saul, or Cal for that matter, might have it now. Cal had a big old faded bathrobe she sometimes mucked around in—

But, no, it was ridiculous to suspect any of them. Face up to it, while he was gadding about out here, satisfying obscure esthetic curiosities, some sneak thief, probably on hard drugs, had somehow got into his apartment and was ripping him off.

He took up the binoculars again in a hard fury and found his apartment at once, but this time he was too late. While he'd been steadying his nerves and wildly speculating, the sun had moved on, the slot had filled with shadow, so that he could no longer make out his window, let along any figure in it.

His anger faded. He realized it had been mostly reaction to his little shock at what he'd seen, or thought he'd seen...no, he'd seen *something*, but as to exactly what, who could be sure?

He stood up on his rocky seat, rather slowly, for his legs were a bit numb from sitting and his back was stiff, and he stepped carefully up into the wind. He felt depressed — and no wonder, for streamers of fog were blowing in from the west, around the TV tower and half masking it, there were shadows everywhere. Corona Heights had lost its magic for him, he just wanted to get off it as soon as

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possible (and back to check his room). So after a quick look at his map, he headed straight down the far side, as the hikers had.

It was steeper than it looked, and several times he had to restrain his impulse to hurry and make himself move carefully. Then, halfway down, a couple of big dogs came to circle and snarl at him, not St. Bernards but those black Dobermans that always made one think of the SS. Their owner down below took his time calling them off, too. Franz almost ran across the green field at the hill's base and through the small door in the high wire fence.

Soon — but not too soon for him, by any means — he was hurrying along Buena Vista Drive East. The park it closely skirted — another elevation, but a wooded one — mounted up from beside him dark green and full of shadows. In his present mood it looked anything but a "good view" to him, rather an ideal spot for heroin intrigues and sordid murders. The sun was altogether gone by now and ragged arms of fog came curving after him. When he got to Duboce, he wanted to rush down, but the sidewalks were too steep — as steep as any he'd seen on any of San Francisco's more than seven hills — and once again he had to grit his teeth and place his feet with care and take his time.

He caught the N-Judah car where it comes out of the tunnel under Buena Vista Park (Frisco's hills were honeycombed with 'em, he thought) and rode it down Market to the Civic Center. Among the crowders boarding a 19-Polk there, a hulking drab shape lurching up behind him gave him a start, but it was only a blank-eyed workman powdered with pale dust from some demolition job.

He got off the 19 at Geary. In the lobby of 811 Geary there was only Fernando vacuuming, a sound as gray and hollow as the day had grown outside. He would have liked to chat, but the short man, blocky and somber as a Peruvian idol, had less English than his sister and was additionally rather deaf. They bowed gravely to each other, exchanged a "Senyor Lookay" and a "Meestair Jueston," Fernando's rendering of "Westen."

He rode the creaking elevator up to six. He had the impulse to stop at Cal's or the boys' first, but it was a matter of...well, courage, not to. The hall was dark (a ceiling globe was out) and the shaft window and knobless closet door next to his room darker. As he approached his own door, he realized his heart was thumping. Feeling both foolish and apprehensive, he slipped his key into the lock, and clutching his binoculars in his other hand as an impromptu weapon, he

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thrust the door swiftly open and quickly switched on the ceiling light inside.

The 200-watt glare showed his room empty and undisturbed. From the inside of the still-tousled bed, his colorful "scholar's mistress" seemed to wink at him humorously. Nevertheless, he didn't feel secure until he'd rather shamefacedly peered in the bathroom and then opened the closet and the tall clothes cabinet and glanced inside.

He switched off the top light then and went to the open window. The green drapes were lined with a sun-faded tan, all right, but if they'd been blown halfway out the window at some point, a change of wind had blown them neatly back into place afterwards. The serrated hump of Corona Heights showed up dimly through the advancing high fog. The TV tower was wholly veiled. He looked down and saw that the window sill and his narrow desk abutting it and the carpet at his feet were all strewn with crumbles of brownish paper. He recalled that he'd been handling some old pulp magazines here yesterday, tearing out pages he wanted to save.

The tension that had been knotting him departed at last. He realized he was very thirsty. He got a split of ginger ale from the small refrigerator and drank it eagerly. While he made coffee on the hot plate, he sketchily straightened the disordered half of the bed and turned on the shaded light at its head. He carried there his coffee and the two books he'd shown Cal that morning, and settled himself comfortably, and read around in them and speculated.

When he realized it was getting darker outside, he poured himself more coffee and carried it down to Cal's. The door was ajar. Inside, Cal's shoulders were lifting rhythmically as she played with furious precision, her ears covered with large padded phones. Franz couldn't be sure whether he heard the ghost of a concerto or only the very faint thuds of the keys.

Saul and Gun were talking quietly on the couch, the latter with a green bottle beside him.

Saul, a thin man with dark hair shoulder-length and dark-circled eyes, quirked a smile and said, "Hello. Calvina asked us down to keep her company while she practices, though you'd think a couple of window dummies could do the job as well. But Calvina's a romantic puritan at heart. Deep inside she wants to frustrate us."

Cal had taken off her headphones and stood up. Without a word or a look at anyone, or anything apparently, she picked up some clothes and vanished like a sleepwalker into the bathroom, whence there came presently the

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sound of showering.

Gun grinned at Franz and said, "Greetings. Take a pew. How goes the writer's life?" He was a tall man, ashen blonde, a fine-down amiable Viking.

They talked inconsequentially and lazily of this and that. Saul carefully made a long thin cigarette. Its piny smoke was pleasant, but Franz and Gun smilingly declined to share, Gun tilting his green bottle for a long swallow.

Cal reappeared in a surprisingly short time, looking fresh and demure in a dark-brown dress. She poured herself a tall thin glass of orange juice from the fridge and sat down.

"Saul," she said quietly, "you know my long name is not Calvina, but Calpurnia — the minor Roman Cassandra who kept warning Caesar. I may be a puritan, but I wasn't named for Calvin. My parents were both born Presbyterians, it's true, but my father early progressed into Unitarianism and died a devout Ethical Culturist. He used to pray to Emerson and swear by Robert Ingersoll. While my mother was, rather frivolously, into Bahai. And I don't own a couple of window dummies, or I might use them. No, no pot, thank you. I have to hold myself intact until tomorrow night. Franz, you look quietly prodigious. What happened at Corona Heights?"

Pleased that she had been thinking about him and observing him so closely and accurately, Franz told the story of his adventure. He was struck by how in the telling it became rather trivial-seeming and less frightening, though paradoxically more entertaining — the writer's curse and blessing.

Gun happily summed up: "So you go to investigate this apparition or whatnot, and find it's pulled the big switch and is thumbing its nose at you from your own window two miles away. 'Taffy went to my house' — that's neat."

Saul said, "Your Taffy story reminds me of my Mr. Edwards. He gets the idea that two enemies in a parked car across the street from the hospital have got a pain-ray projector trained on him. We wheel him over there so he can see for himself there ain't no one in any of the cars. He's very much relieved and keeps thanking us, but when we get him back to his room, he lets out a sudden squeal of agony. Seems his enemies have taken advantage of his absence to plant a pain-ray projector somewhere in the walls."

Franz said; "Saul, I may very well have been projecting, at least in part, but, if so, what? Also, the figure was nondescript, remember, and wasn't doing aything objectively sinister."

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Saul said, "Look, I wasn't suggesting any parallel. That's your idea. I was just reminded of another weird incident."

Gun guffawed. "Saul doesn't think we're all completely crazy. Just fringe-psychotic."

There was a knock and then the door opened as Dorotea Luque let herself in. She was a slender version of her brother, with a beautiful Incan profile and jet-black hair. She had a small parcel-post package of books for Franz.

"I wondered you'd be down here, and then I heard you talk," she explained. "Did you find the e-scary things to write about with your...how you say...?" She made binoculars of her hands and held them to her eyes and then looked questioningly when they all laughed.

While Cal got her a glass of wine, Franz hastened to explain. To his surprise, she took the figure in the window very seriously.

"But are you e-sure you weren't ripped off?" she demanded anxiously. "We've had an e-stealer on the second floor."

"My portable TV and tape recorder were there," he told her. "A thief would take those first."

"But how about your marrow bone?" Saul put it. "Taffy get that?"

"And did you close your transom and double-lock your door?" Dorotea persisted, illustrating the latter with a vigorous twist of her wrist. "Is double-locked now?"

"I always double-lock it," Franz assured her. "The transom, no. I like it open for ventilation."

"Should always close the transom too when you go out," she pronounced. "All of you, you hear me? Well, I am glad you weren't ripped off. *Gracias,*" she added, nodding to Cal as she sipped her wine.

Cal smiled and said to Saul and Gun, "Why shouldn't a modern city have its special ghosts, like castles and graveyards and big manor houses once had?"

Saul said, "My Mrs. Willis thinks the skyscrapers are out to get her. At night they make themselves still skinnier, she says, and come sneaking down the streets after her."

Gun said, "I once heard lightning whistle over Chicago. There was a thunderstorm over the Loop, and I was on the South Side at the university, right near the site of the first atomic pile. There'd be a flash on the northern horizon and then, seven seconds later, not thunder, but this high-pitched moaning scream. I had the idea that all the elevated tracks were audio-resonating a radio component of the flash."

Cal said eagerly, "Why mightn't the sheer mass of all that

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steel—? Franz, tell them about the book."

He repeated what he'd told her this morning about *Megapolisomancy* and a little besides.

Gun broke in, "And he says our modern cities are our Egyptian pyramids? That's beautiful. Just imagine how, when we've all been killed off by pollution, an archaeological expedition arrives by spaceship from another solar system and starts to explore us like a bunch of goddamn Egyptologists! What would they make of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Empire State? Or the Sears Building in Chicago? Or even the Transamerica Pyramid here? They'd probably decide they were all built for religious and occult purposes, like Stonehenge. They'd never imagine people lived and worked there. No question, our cities will be the eeriest ruins ever. Franz, this de Castries had a sound idea — the sheer amount of stuff there is in cities. That's heavy, heavy."

Saul put in: "Mrs. Willis says the skyscrapers get very heavy at night when they — excuse me — screw her."

Dorotea Luque's eyes grew larger, then she exploded in giggles. "Oh, that's naughty," she repoved him merrily, wagging a finger. Gun got her more wine and himself another bottle of ale.

Cal said, "Franz, I've been thinking on and off all day, in the corner of my mind that wasn't Brandenburging, about that '607 Rhodes' that drew you to move here. Was it a definite place? And if so, where?"

"607 Rhodes, what's that all about?" Saul asked.

Franz explained again about the rice-paper journal and the violet-ink person who might have been Clark Ashton Smith and his possible interviews with de Castries. Then he said, "The 607 can't be a street address, like 811 Geary here, say. There's no such street as Rhodes in Frisco, I've checked. And it's clear from the entires that the 607 place is here downtown, within easy walking distance of Union Square. And once the journal keeper describes looking out the window at Corona Heights and Mt. Sutro — of course, there wasn't any TV tower then—"

"Hell, in 1928 there weren't even the Bay and Golden Gate Bridges," Gun put in.

Cal said, "Maybe Rhodes is the name of a building or hotel. You know, the Rhodes Building."

"Not unless the name's been changed since 1928," Franz told her. "There's nothing like that now that I've heard of. The name Rhodes strike a bell with any of you?"

It didn't. Gun speculated, "I

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wonder if *this* building ever had a name, the poor old raddled dear."

Dorotea shook her head. "Is just 811 Geary. Was once hotel, maybe — you know, night clerk and maids. But I don't know."

"Buildings Anonymous," Saul remarked without looking up from the reefer he was making.

"Now we do close transom," said Dorotea, suiting actions to words. "Okay smoke pot. But do not — how you say? — advertise."

Heads nodded wisely.

After a bit they all decided that they were hungry and should eat together at the German Cook's around the corner because it was his night for sauerbraten. Dorotea was persuaded to join them. On the way she picked up her daughter Bonita and the taciturn Fernando, who now beamed.

Walking together, Cal asked Franz, "Taffy is something more serious then you're making out, isn't it?"

He had to agree, though he was becoming curiously uncertain of some of the things that had happened today — the usual, not-unpleasant evening fog settling around his mind. High in the sky, the lopsided circle of the gibbous moon challenged the streetlights.

He said, "When I thought I saw that thing in my window, I strained for all sorts of explanations, to avoid having to accept a...well, supernatural one. I even thought it might have been you in your old bathrobe."

"Well, it could have been me, except it wasn't," she said calmly. "I've still got your key, you know. Gun gave it to me that day your big package was coming and Dorotea was out. I'll give it to you after dinner."

"No hurry," he said.

"I wish we could figure out that 607 Rhodes," she said.

"I'll try to think of a way," he said. "Cal, did your father actually swear by Robert Ingersoll?"

"Oh, yes — 'In the name of...' and so on — and by William James, too, and Felix Adler, the man who founded Ethical Culture. His rather atheistic co-religionists thought it odd of him, but he liked the ring of sacerdotal language. He thought of science as a sacrament."

At the friendly little restaurant they put two tables together. Gun switched to a dark beer. Saul ordered a bottle of red wine for himself and the Luques. The sauerbraten was delicious, the potato pancakes with applesauce out of this world. Bela, the gleaming-faced German Cook (Hungarian, actually) had outdone himself.

In a lull in the conversation Gun said to Franz, "That was really a very strange thing that happened to you on Corona Heights. As near as you can get

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today to what you'd call the supernatural."

Saul heard and said at once, "Hey, what's a materialist scientist like you doing talking about the supernatural?"

"Come off it, Saul," Gun answered with a chuckle. "I deal with matter, sure. But what is that? Invisible particles, waves, and force fields. Nothing solid at all. Don't teach your grandmother to suck eggs."

"You're right," Saul grinned, sucking his. "There's no reality but the individual's immediate sensations, his awareness. All else is inference. Even the individuals are inference."

Cal said, "I think the only reality is number...and music, which comes to the same thing."

"My computers agree with you, all the way down the line," Gun told her. "Number is all they know."

Franz said, "I'm glad to hear you all talk that way. You see, supernatural horror is my bread and butter, and sometimes people tell me there's no such thing any more — That science has solved, or can solve, all mysteries, that religion is just another name for social service, and that modern people are too sophisticated and knowledgeable to be scared of ghosts even for kicks."

"Don't make me laugh," Gun said. "Science has only increased the area of the unknown. And if there is a god, her name is Mystery."

Dorotea Luque said eagerly, "But are e-strange things. In Lima. This city too. *Bruhas* — how you say? — witches!" She shuddered happily.

Her brother beamed his understanding and lifted a hand to preface one of his rare remarks. "*Hay hechiceria,*" he said vehemently, with a great air of making himself clear, "*Hechiceria ocultado en murallas.*" He crouched a little, looking up. "*Murallas muy altas!*"

Everyone nodded pleasantly, as if they understood. Franz asked Cal in a low voice, "What's that?"

She whispered, "Witchcraft, I think. Witchcraft hidden in the wall. Very high walls." She shrugged.

Franz murmured, "Where in the walls, I wonder? Like Mr. Edwards' pain-ray projector?"

Gun said, "There's one thing, though, Franz, I do wonder about — whether you really identified your own window correctly from Corona. You said the roofs were like a sea on edge. It reminds me of difficulties I've run into in identifying localities in photographs of stars, or pictures of the earth taken from satellites. So many times you run into two or more localities that are *almost* identical."

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"I've thought of that myself," Franz said. "I'll check it out."

Leaning back, Saul said, "Say, here's a good idea, let's all of us some day soon go for a picnic to Corona Heights. Gun and I could bring our ladies — they'd like it. How does that grab you, Bonny?"

"Oh, yes," the 13-year-old Bonita, already as tall as her mother, replied eagerly.

On that note they broke up.

Dorotea said, "We thank you for the wine. But all remember, double-lock doors and close transoms when go out."

Cal said, "Now with any luck I'll sleep 12 hours. Franz, I'll give you your key some other time."

He smiled and asked Fernando if he cared to play chess. The Peruvian grinned agreeably.

In Franz's room they divided two rather long, hard-fought games, which were just the thing to occupy fully Franz's dulled evening mind, and during them he became aware of how physically tired his climbing had left him.

As Fernando departed, the Peruvian pointed at the board and asked, *"Manana por la noche?"*

That much Spanish Franz understood. He smiled and nodded. If he couldn't play chess again tomorrow night, he could always let Dorotea know.

He slept like the dead and without any remembered dreams.

He awoke completely refreshed, his mind clear and sharp and very calm, his thoughts measured and sure — a good sleep's benison. All of the evening dullness and uncertainty were gone. He remembered each of yesterday's events just as it had happened, but without the emotional overtones of excitement and fear.

The constellation of Orion was shouldering into his window, telling him dawn was near. Its nine brightest stars made an angular, tilted hourglass, challenging the smaller, slenderer one made by the 19 winking red lights of the TV tower.

He made himself a small, quick cup of coffee with the very hot water from the tap, then put on slippers and robe and took up his binoculars and went very quietly to the roof. All his sensations were sharp. The black windows of the shafts and the black knobless doors of the disused closets stood out as distinctly as the doors of the occupied rooms and the one banister, many times repainted, he touched as he climbed.

In the room on the roof his small flashlight showed the gleaming cables, the dark, hunched electric motor, and the oddly bunched small, silent iron arms of the relays that would wake violently and make a great sudden noise, swinging and snapping, if someone

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pressed an electric button below.

Outside, the night wind was bracing.

He looked up at the stars studding the dark dome of night like tiny silver nails. Bringing his binoculars into play, he scanned the golden swarm of the Hyades and the tiny bluish-white dipper of the Pleiades.

The sure and steady stars fitted the mood of his morning mind and reinforced it. He looked again at tilted Orion, then dropped his gaze to the red-flashing TV tower. Below it, Corona Heights was a black hump amongst the city's lights.

The memory came to him (crystal-clear drop, as memories came to him these days in the hour after waking) of how when he'd first seen the TV tower at night, he'd thought of a line from Lovecraft's story, "The Haunter of the Dark," where the watcher of another ill-omened hill (Federal in Providence) sees that "the red Industrial Trust beacon had blazed up to make the night grotesque." When he'd first seen the tower, he'd thought it worse than grotesque, but now — how strange! — it had become almost as reassuring to him as starry Orion.

"The Haunter of the Dark!" he thought with a quiet laugh. Yesterday he had lived through a section of a story that might fittingly be called "The Lurker at the Summit." How very strange!

Before returning to his room he briefly surveyed the dark rectangles and skinny pyramid of the downtown skyscrapers — old Thibaut's bugaboos! — the tallest of them with their own warning red lights.

He made himself more coffee, this time using the hot plate and adding sugar and half-and-half. Then he settled himself in bed, determined to use his morning mind to clarify matters that had grown cloudy last evening. Thibaut's drab book and the washed-out tea-rose journal already made the head of his colorful Scholar's Mistress lying beside him on the inside. To them he added the thick black rectangles of Lovecraft's *The Outsider* and *The Collected Ghost Stories* of Montague Rhodes James and also several yellowed old copies of *Weird Tales* (some puritan had torn their lurid covers off) containing stories by Clark Ashton Smith, shifting some bright magazines to the floor to make room, and the colorful napkins with them.

"You're fading, dear," he told her gayly in his thoughts, "putting on somber hues. Are you getting dressed for a funeral?"

Then for a space he read more systematically in *Megapolisomancy*. My God, the old boy certainly could do a sort of scholarly-flamboyant thing quite well. Consider:

At any particular time of

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history there have always been one or two cities of the monstrous sort — *viz.*, Babel or Babylon, Ur-Lhassa, Ninevah, Syracuse, Rome, Samarkand, Tenochtitlan, Peking — but we live in the Megapolitan (or Necropolitan) Age, when such disastrous blights are manifold and threaten to conjoin and enshroud the world with funebral yet multipotent city-stuff. We need a Black Pythagoras to spy out the evil lay of our monstrous cities and their foul shrieking songs, even as the White Pythagoras spied out the lay of the heavenly spheres and their crystalline symphonies, two and a half millennia ago.

Or, adding thereto more of his own brand of the occult:

Since we modern city-men already dwell in tombs, inured after a fashion to mortality, the possibility arises of the indefinite prolongation of this life-in-death. Yet, although quite practicable, it would be a most morbid and dejected existence, without vitality or even thought, but only paramentation, our chief companions paramental entities of azoic origin more vicious than spiders or weasels.

Now what would paramentation be like? Franz wondered. Trance? Opium dreams? Dark, writhing phantoms born of sensory deprivation? Or something different?

Or:

The electro-mephitic city-stuff whereof I speak has potencies for achieving vast effects at distant times and localities, even in the far future and on other orbs, but of the manipulations required for the production and control of such I do not intend to discourse in these pages.

As the overworked, yet vigorous current exclamation had it, *wow!* Franz picked up the journal.

Smith (he was sure it was he) had certainly been greatly impressed by de Castries (must be he also), as well he might have been almost fifty years ago. And he had clearly read *Megapolisomancy* too. It occurred to Franz that this copy was most likely Smith's. Here was a typical passage in the journal:

Three hours today at 607 Rhodes with the furious Tybalt. All I could take. Half the time railing at his fallen-off acolytes, the other half contemptuously tossing me scraps of paranatural truth. But what scraps! That bit about the significance of diagonal streets! How that old devil sees into cities and their invisible sicknesses — a new Pasteur, but of the dead-alive.

He says his book is kindergarten stuff, but the new thing — the core and why of it and how to work it — he keeps only in his mind and in the Grand Cipher

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he's so sly about. He sometimes calls it (the Cipher) his Fifty-Book, that is, if I'm right and they are the same. Why fifty?

I should write Howard about it, he'd be astounded and — yes! — transfigured, it so agrees with *and illuminates* the decadent and putrescent horror he finds in New York City and Boston and even Providence (not Levantines and Mediterraneans, but half-sensed paramentals!). But I'm not sure he could take it. For that matter, I'm not sure how much more of it I can take myself. And if I so much as hint to old Tiberius at sharing his paranatural knowledge with other kindred spirits, he grows as ugly as his namesake in his last Caprian days and goes back to excoriating those whom he feels failed and betrayed him in the Hermetic Order he created.

I should get out myself — I've all that I can use and there are stories crying to be written. But can I give up the ultimate ecstasy of knowing each day I'll hear from the very lips of Black Pythagoras some new paranatural truth? It's like a drug I have to have. Who can give up such fantasy? — especially when *the fantasy is the truth.*

The paranatural, only a word — *but what it signifies!* The supernatural — a dream of grandmothers and priests and horror writers. But the *paranatural!* Yet how much can I take? Could I stand full contact with a paramental entity and not crack up?

Coming back today, I felt that my senses were metamorphosing. San Francisco was a mega-necropolis vibrant with paramentals on the verge of vision and of audition, each block a surreal cenotaph would bury Dali, and I one of the living dead aware of everything with cold delight. But now I am afraid of this room's walls!

Franz glanced with a chuckle at the drab wall next to the inside of the bed and below the spiderwebby drawing of the TV tower on fluorescent red, remarking to his Scholar's Mistress lying between them, "He certainly was worked up about it, wasn't he, dear?"

Then his face grew intent again. The "Howard" in the entry had to be Lovecraft, with his regrettable but undeniable loathing of the immigrant swarms he felt were threatening the traditions and monuments of his beloved New England and the whole Eastern Seaboard. While the mention of a Black Pythagoras was pretty well enough by itself to prove that the keeper of the journal had read de Castries' book. And those references to a Hermetic Order and a

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Grand Cipher (or Fifty-Book) teased the imagination. But Smith (who else?) had clearly been as much terrified as fascinated by the ramblings of his crabbed mentor. It showed up even more strikingly in a later entry:

Hated what gloating Tiberius hinted today about the disappearance of Bierce and the deaths of Sterling and Jack London. Not only that they were suicides (which I categorically deny, particularly in the case of Sterling!) but that there were other elements in their deaths — elements for which the old devil appears *to take credit.*

He positively sniggered as he said, "You can be sure of one thing, my dear boy, that all of them had a very rough time *paramentally* before they were snuffed out, or shuffled off to their gray paranatural hells. Very distressing, but it's the common fate of Judases — and little busybodies," he added, glaring at me from under his tangled white eyebrows.

Could he be hypnotizing me?

Why do I linger on, now that the menaces outweigh the revelations? That disjointed stuff about techniques of giving paramental entities the scent — clearly a threat.

Franz frowned. He knew quite a bit about the brilliant literary group centered in San Francisco at the turn of the century and of the strangely large number of them who had come to tragic ends — among those, the macabre writer Ambrose Bierce vanishing in revolution-torn Mexico in 1913, London dying of uremia and morphine poisoning a little later, and the fantasy poet Sterling perishing of poison in the 1920s. He reminded himself to ask Jaime Donaldus Byers more about the whole business at the first opportunity.

The final diary entry, which broke off in the middle of a sentence, was the same vein:

Today surprised Tiberius making entries in black ink in a ledger of the sort used for bookkeeping. His Fifty-Book? The Grand Cipher? I glimpsed a solid page of what looked like astronomical and astrological symbols (Could there be fifty such?) before he snapped it shut and accused me of spying. I tried to get him off the topic, but he would talk of nothing else.

Why do I stay? The man is a genius (paragenius?) but he's also a paranoiac!

He shook the ledger at me, cackling, "Perhaps you should sneak in some night on those quiet little feet of yours and steal it! Yes, why not do that? It would merely mean your finish, paramentally speaking! That

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wouldn't hurt. Or would it?"

Yes, by God, it is time I

Franz riffled through the next few pages, all blank, and then gazed over them at the window, which from the bed showed only the equally blank wall of the nearer of the two high rises. It occurred to him what an eerie fantasia of *buildings* all this was: de Castries' ominous theories about them, Smith seeing San Francisco as a...yes, mega-necropolis, Lovecraft's horror of the swarming towers of New York, the downtown skyscrapers seen from the roof here, the sea of roofs he'd scanned from Corona Heights, and this beaten old building itself, with its dark halls and yawning lobby, strange shafts and closets, black windows and hiding holes.

He made himself more coffee — it had been full daylight now for some time — and lugged back to bed with him an armful of books from the shelves of his desk. To make room for them, more of the colorful recreational reading had to go on the floor. He joked with his Scholar's Mistress, "You're growing darker and more intellectual, my dear, but not a day older and as slim as ever. How do you manage it?"

The new books were a fair sampling of what he thought of as his reference library of the really eerie. There was Prof. D. M. Nostig's *The Subliminal Occult*, that curious, intensely skeptical book which rigorously disposes of all claims of the learned parapsychologists and still finds a residue of the inexplicable; Montague's witty and profound monograph *White Tape* with its thesis that civilization is being asphyxiated, mummy-wrapped by its own records, bureaucratic and otherwise, and by its infinitely recessive self-observations; precious dingy copies of those two exceedingly rare, slim books thought spurious by many critics — *Ames et Fantomes de Douleur* by the Marquis de Sade and *Knockenmadchen im Pelze mit Peitsche* by Sacher-Masoch; *The Mauritzius Case* by Jacob Wasserman; *Journey to the End of Night* by Celine; several copies of Bonewitz's periodical *Gnostica; The Spider Glyph in Time* by Mauricio Santos-Lobos; and the monumental *Sex, Death and Supernatural Dread* by Ms. Frances D. Lettland, Ph.B.

For a long space his morning mind darted about happily in the eerie wonder-world evoked and buttressed by these books and de Castries' and the journal and by clear-cut memories of yesterday's rather strange experiences. Truly, modern cities were the world's supreme mysteries, and skyscrapers their secular cathedrals.

Meanwhile his intentions were

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firming as to how he'd spend this day, which promised to be a beauty too. First, start pinning down that elusive 607 Rhodes, beginning by getting the history of this anonymous building, 811 Geary. It would make an excellent test case. Next go to Corona Heights again to check out whether he'd really seen his own window from there. Sometime in the afternoon visit Jaime Donaldus Byers. (Call him first.) Tonight, of course, Cal's concert.

He blinked and looked around. Despite the open window, the room was full of smoke. With a sorry laugh he carefully stubbed out his cigarette on the edge of the heaped ashtray.

The phone rang. It was Cal inviting him down to late breakfast. He showered and shaved and dressed and went.

In the doorway Cal looked so sweet and young in a green dress, her hair in a long pony tail, that he wanted to grab and kiss her. But she also still had on her rapt, meditative look — "Keep intact for Bach."

She said, "Hello, dear. I actually slept those twelve hours I threatened to in my pride. God is merciful. Do you mind eggs again? It's really brunchtime. Pour yourself coffee."

"Any more practice today?" he asked, glancing toward the electronic keyboard.

"Yes, but not with that. This afternoon I'll have three or four hours with the concert harpsichord. And I'll be tuning it."

He drank creamed coffee and watched the poetry of motion as she dreamily broke eggs, an unconscious ballet of white ovoids and slender, work-flattened fingertips. He found himself comparing her to Daisy and, to his amusement, to his Scholar's Mistress. Cal and the latter were both slender, somewhat intellectual, rather silent types, touched with the White Goddess definitely, dreamy but disciplined. Daisy had been touched with the White Goddess too, a poet, and also disciplined, keeping herself intact...for brain cancer. He veered off from that.

Cal really did look such a schoolgirl, her face a mask of gay innocence and good behavior. But then he remembered her as she had launched into the first piece of a concert. He'd been sitting up close and a little to one side so that he had seen her full profile. As if by some swift magic, she had become someone he'd never seen before and wasn't sure for a moment he wanted to. Her chin had tucked down into her neck, her nostril had flared, her eye had become all-seeing and merciless, her lips had pressed together and turned down at the corners quite nastily, like a savage schoolmistress, and it had

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been as if she had been saying, "Now hear me, all you strings and *Mister* Chopin. You behave perfectly now, *or else...!*" It had been the look of the young professional.

"Eat them while they're hot," Cal murmured, slipping his plate in front of him. "Here's the toast. Buttered, somehow."

After a while she asked, "How did you sleep?"

He told her about the stars.

She said, "I'm glad you worship."

"Yes, that's true in a way," he had to admit. "St. Copernicus, at any rate, and Isaac Newton."

"My father used to swear by them too," she told him. "Even, I remember once, by Einstein. I started to do it myself too, but mother gently discouraged me. She thought it tomboyish."

Franz smiled. He didn't bring up this morning's reading or yesterday's events, they seemed wrong topics for now.

She observed placidly, "You're very brisk and brimming with energy this morning. Almost bumptious, except you're being considerate for my mood. But underneath you're thoughtful. What are your plans for today?"

He told her.

"That sounds good," she said. "I've heard Byer's place is quite spooky. Or maybe they meant exotic. And I'd really like to find out about 607 Rhodes. That would be fascinating. Well, I should be getting ready."

"Will I see you before? Take you there?" he asked as he got up.

"No, not before, I think," she said thoughtfully. "But afterwards." She smiled at him. "I'm relieved to hear you'll be there. Take care, Franz."

"You take care too, Cal," he told her.

"On concert days I wrap myself in wool. No, wait."

She came toward him, head lifted, continuing to smile. He got his arms around her before they kissed. Her lips were soft and cool.

An hour later a pleasantly grave young man in the recorder's office at city hall informed Franz that 811 Geary Street was designated Block 320, Lot 23 in his province.

"For anything about the lot's previous history," he said, "you'd go to the assessor's office. They would know, because they handle taxes."

Franz crossed the wide, echoing marble corridor two stories high to the assessor's office, which flanked the main entrance to city hall on the other side. The two great civic guards and idols, he thought, papers and monies.

A worried woman with graying red hair told him, "Your next step is to go to the office of building permits in the city hall annex across

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the street, to your left when you go out, and find when a permit to build on the lot was applied for. When you bring us that information, we can help you. It should be easy. They won't have to go back far. Everything in that area went down in 1906."

Franz obeyed, thinking that all this was becoming not just a fantasia but a ballet of buildings. Investigating just one modest building had led him into what you could call this Courtly Minuet of the Run-Around. Doubtless the bothersome public was supposed to get bored and give up at this point, but he'd feel 'em! The brimming spirits Cal had noticed in himself were still high.

Yes, a national ballet of all buildings great and small, skyscrapers and shacks, all going up and haunting our streets and cross streets for a while and then eventually coming down, whether helped by earthquakes or not, to the tune of ownership, money, and records.

In the annex, a businesslike building with low ceilings, Franz was pleasantly surprised (but his cynicism rather dashed) when a portly young Chinaperson, upon being properly supplicated with the ritual formula of numbered block and lot, within two minutes handed him a folded old printed form filled in with ink that had turned brown and which began "Application for Permit to erect a 7-story Brick Building with Steel Frame on the south side of Geary Street 25 feet west of Hyde Street at Estimated Cost of $74,870.00 for Use as a Hotel," and ended with "Filed July 15, 1925."

His first thought was that Cal and the others would be relieved to hear that the building apparently had a steel frame — a point they'd wondered about during earthquake speculations and to which they'd never been able to get a satisfactory answer. His second was that the date made the building almost disappointingly recent — the San Francisco of Dashiell Hammett... and Clark Ashton Smith. Still, the big bridges hadn't been built then, ferries did all their work. Fifty years was a respectable age.

He copied out most of the brown-ink stuff, returned the application to the stout young man (who smiled, hardly inscrutably) and footed it back to the assessor's office, swinging his brief case jauntily. The red-haired woman was worrying elsewhere, and two ancient men who both limped received his information dubiously, but finally deigned to consult a computer, joking together as to whether it would work, but clearly reverent for all their humor.

One of them pushed some buttons and read off from a screen

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invisible to the public, "Yep, permit granted September nine, 1925, and built in '26. Construction completed Jun — June."

"They said it was for use as a hotel," Franz asked. "Could you tell me what name?"

"For that you'd have to consult a city directory for the year. Ours don't go back that far. Try in the public library across the square."

Franz dutifully crossed the wide gray expanse, dark green with little segregated trees and bright with small gushing fountains and two long pools rippling in the wind. On all four sides the civic buildings stood pompously, most of them blocky nondescript, but city hall behind him with its greenish dome and classic cupola and the main public library ahead somewhat more decorated.

Feeling ebullient and now a bit lucky too, Franz hurried. He still had much to do today and the high sun said it was getting on. Inside the swinging doors he angled through the press of harsh young women with glasses, children, belted hippies, and cranky old men (typical readers all), returned two books, and took the elevator to the empty corridor of the third floor. In the hushed, rather elegant San Francisco Room a slightly precious lady whispered to him that her city directories only went up to 1918, the later (more common?) ones were in the main catalogue room on the second floor with the phone books.

Feeling slightly deflated and a bit run-around again, but not much, Franz descended to the big, fantastically high-ceilinged familiar room. In a corner partitioned off by high, packed shelves, he found the rows of books he wanted. His hand went toward the 1926, then shifted to the 1927 — that would be sure to list the hotel, if there had been one. Now for some fun! — looking up the addresses of everyone mentioned in the application and finding the hotel itself, of course.

Before seating himself he glanced at his wristwatch. My God, it was later than he'd thought. If he didn't make up some time, he'd arrive at Corona Heights after the sun had left the slot and so too late for the experiment he intended. And books like this didn't circulate.

He took only a couple of seconds coming to a decision. After a casual but searching look all around to make sure no one was watching him at the moment, he thrust the directory into his deep brief case and marched out of the catalogue room, picking up a couple of paperbacks at random from one of the revolving wire stands set here and there. He stopped at the desk to check them out and drop them ostentatiously

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into his brief case, and then walked out of the building without a glance at the guard, who never did look into brief cases and bags (so far as Franz had noticed) provided he'd seen you check out some books at the desk.

Franz seldom did that sort of thing, but today's promise seemed to make it worth taking little risks.

There was a 19-Polk coming outside. He caught it.

At 811 he glanced at his mail (nothing worth opening right away) and then looked around the room. He'd left the transom open. Dorotea was right — a thin, athletic person could crawl through it. He shut it. Then he leaned out the open casement window and checked each way — to either side and up (one window like his, then the roof) and down (Cal's two below and, three below that, the shaft's grimy bottom, a cul-de-sac, scattered with junk fallen over the years). There was no way anyone could reach this window short of using ladders. But he noticed that his bathroom window was only a short step away from the window of the next apartment on this floor. He went and made sure it was locked.

Then he took off the wall the big spidery black sketch of the TV tower that was almost entirely bright fluorescent red background and securely wedged and thumbtacked it, red side out, in the open casement window, using drawing pins. There! That would show up unmistakably from Corona in the sunlight when it came.

Next he put on a light sweater under his coat (it seemed a bit chillier than yesterday) and stuck an extra pack of cigarettes in his pocket. He didn't pause to make himself a sandwich (after all, he'd had *two* pieces of toast this morning at Cal's). At the last minute he remembered to stuff his binoculars and map into his pocket, *and* Smith's journal; he might want to refer to it at Byers's. (He'd called the man up earlier and got a typically effusive but somewhat listless invitation to drop in any time after the middle of the afternoon and stay if he liked for the little party coming up in the evening. Some of the guests would be in costume, but costume was not mandatory.)

As a final touch he placed the 1927 city directory where his Scholar's Mistress' rump would be and, giving it a quick intimate caress, said flippantly, "There, my dear, I've made you a receiver of stolen property, but don't worry, you're going to give it back."

Then without further leave-taking, or any send-off at all, he double-locked the door behind him and was away into the wind and sunlight.

At the corner there was no bus

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coming, and so he started to walk the eight short blocks to Market, striding briskly. At Ellis he deliberately devoted a few seconds to looking at (worshipping?) his favorite tree in San Francisco: a six-story candlestick pine, guyed by some thin strong wires, greenly flourishing behind a brown wooden wall trimmed with yellow between two taller buildings in a narrow notch the high-rise moguls had somehow overlooked. Inefficient bastards!

A block farther on, the bus overtook him and he got aboard — it would save a minute. Transferring to the N-Judah car at Market, he got a start (and had to side-step swiftly) when a pallid drunk in a shapeless, dirty, pale-gray suit (but no shirt) came staggering diagonally from nowhere (and apparently bound for the same place). He thought, "There but for the grace of God, et cetera," and veered off from those thoughts, as he had at Cal's from the memories of Daisy's mortal disease.

In fact, he banished all dark stuff so well from his mind that the creaking car seemed to mount Market and then Duboce in the bright sunlight like the victorious general's chariot in a Roman triumph. He swung off at the tunnel's mouth and climbed dizzying Duboce, breathing deeply. It seemed not quite so steep today, or else he was fresher. While the neighborhood looked particularly neat and friendly.

At the top a young couple hand in hand (lovers quite obviously) were entering the dappling shades and green glooms of Buena Vista Park. Why had the place seemed so sinister yesterday? Some other day he'd follow in their path to the park's pleasantly wooded summit.

But today his was another voyage — he had other business. Pressing business, too. He glanced at his wristwatch and stepped along smartly. Soon he was going through the little gate in the high wire fence and across the green field back of the brown-sloped heights with their rocky crown. To his right, two little girls were supervising a sort of dolls' tea party on the grass. Why, they were the girls he'd seen running yesterday. And just beyond them their St. Bernard was stretched out beside a young woman in faded blue denim.

While to the left, two Dobermans — the same two, by God! — were stretched out and yawning beside another young couple lying close together though not embracing. As Franz smiled at them, the man smiled back and waved a casual greeting. It really was that poet's cliche, "an idyllic scene."

He would have lingered, but time was wasting. Got to go to Taffy's house, he thought with a chuckle. He mounted the ragged,

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gravelly slope — it wasn't all that steep! — with just one breather. Over his shoulder the TV tower stood tall, her colors bright, as fresh and gussied-up and elegant as a brand new whore. (Your pardon, Goddess.) He felt fey.

When he got to the corona, he noticed something he hadn't yesterday. Several of the rock surfaces, at least on this side, had been scrawled on at past times with dark and pale and various colored paints from spray cans, most of it rather weathered now. There weren't so many names and dates as simple figures. Lopsided five and six-pointed stars, a sunburst, crescents, triangles, and squares. He thought of — of all the things! — de Castries' Grand Cipher. Yes, he noted with a grin, there were symbols here that could be taken as astronom- and/or -logical. Those circles with crosses and arrows — Venus and Mars. While that horned disk might be Taurus.

You certainly have odd tastes in interior decoration, Taffy, he told himself. Now to check if you're stealing my marrow bone.

Well, spray-painting signs on rocky eminences was standard practice these progressive, youth-oriented days — the graffiti of the heights. Though he recalled how at the beginning of the century the black magician Aleister Crowley had spent a summer painting in huge red capitals on the Hudson palisades DO WHAT THOU WILT IS THE ONLY COMMANDMENT and EVERY MAN AND WOMAN IS A STAR to shock and instruct New Yorkers on the river boats.

He found his stone seat of yesterday and then made himself smoke a cigarette to give himself time to steady his nerves and breathing, and relax, although he was impatient to make sure he'd kept ahead of the sun. Actually he knew he had, though by a rather slender margin. His wristwatch assured him of that.

It was clearer and sunnier than yesterday, if anything. The strong west wind was sweeping the air. The distant little peaks beyond the East Bay cities and north in Marin County stood out quite sharply. The bridges were bright. Even the sea of roofs itself seemed friendly and calm today.

With unaided eyes he located what he thought was the slot in which his window was — it was full of sun at any rate — and then got out his binoculars. He didn't bother to string them around his neck — his grip was firm today. Yes, there was the fluorescent red, all right, seeming to fill the whole window, the scarlet stood out so, but then you could tell it just occupied the lower left-hand quarter. Why, he could almost make out the drawing

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...no, that would be too much, those thin black lines

So much for Gun's (and his own) doubts as to whether he'd located the right window yesterday!

But the seeing was certainly exceptionally fine today. How clearly pale yellow Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill, once Frisco's tallest structure, now a trifle, stood out against the blue bay. And the high rounded windows of the ship-shaped old Hobart Building's stern, that was like the lofty, richly encrusted admiral's cabin of a galleon, against the stark, vertical aluminum lines of the new Wells Fargo Building towering over it like a space - to - space interstellar freighter waiting to blast. He roved the binoculars around, effortlessly refining the focus.

He took another look into his window slot before the shadow swallowed it. Perhaps he *could* see the drawing if he 'fined the focus....

Even as he watched, the oblong of fluorescent cardboard was jerked out of sight. From his window there thrust itself a pale thing that wildly waved its long uplifted arms at him. While low between them he could see its face stretched toward him, a mask as narrow as a ferret's, a pale brown, utterly blank triangle, two points above that might mean eyes or ears, and one ending below in a tapered chin...no, snout...no, very short trunk — *a questioning mouth that looked as if it were for sucking marrow. Then the paramental entity reached through the glasses at his eyes.*

In his next instant of awareness he was hearing a hollow *chunk* and a faint tinkling and he was searching the dark sea of roofs with his naked eyes to try to locate anywhere a swift pale brown thing stalking him across them and taking advantage of every bit of cover: a chimney and its cap, a cupola, a water tank, a penthouse large or tiny, a thick standpipe, a wind scoop, a ventilator hood, hood of a garbage chute, a skylight, a roof's low walls, the low walls of an air shaft. His heart was pounding and his breathing fast.

His frantic thoughts took another turn, and he was scanning the slopes before and beside him, and the cover their rocks and dry bushes afforded. Who knew how fast a paramental traveled? as a cheetah? as sound? as light? It could well be back here on the heights already. He saw his binoculars below the rock against which he'd unintentionally hurled them when he'd thrust out his hands convulsively to keep the thing out of his eyes.

He scrambled to the top. From the green field below the little girls were gone, and their chaperon and the other couple and the three animals. But even as he was notic-

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ing that, a large dog (one of the Dobermans? or something else?) loped across it toward him and disappeared behind a clump of rocks at the base of the slope. He'd thought of running down that way, but not if that dog (and what others? and what else?) were on the prowl. There was too much cover on this side of Corona Heights.

He stepped quickly down and stood on his stone seat and made himself hold still and look out squintingly until he found the slot where his window was. It was full of darkness, so that even with his binoculars he wouldn't have been able to see anything.

He dropped down to the path, taking advantage of handholds, and while shooting rapid looks around, picked up his broken binoculars and jammed them in his pocket, though he didn't like the way the loose glass in them tinkled a little — or the gravel grated under his careful feet, for that matter. Such small sounds could give away a person's whereabouts.

One instant of awareness couldn't change your life this much, could it? But it had.

He tried to straighten out his reality, while not letting down his guard. To begin with, there were no such things as paramental entities, they were just part of de Castries' 1890's pseudo-science. But he had *seen* one, and as Saul had said, there was no reality except an individual's immediate sensations — vision, hearing, pain, those were real. Deny your mind, deny your sensations, and you deny reality. Even to try to rationalize was to deny. But of course there were *false* sensations, optical and other illusions....Really, now! — try telling a tiger springing upon you he's an illusion. Which left exactly hallucination and, to be sure, insanity. Parts of inner reality...and who was to say how far inner reality went? As Saul had also said, "Who's going to believe a crazy if he says he's just seen a ghost? Inner or outer reality? Who's to tell then?" In any case, Franz told himself, he must keep firmly in mind that he might now be crazy — without letting down his guard one bit on that account either!

All the while that he was thinking these thoughts, he was moving watchfully, carefully, and yet quite rapidly down the slope, keeping a little off the gravel path so as to make less noise, ready to leap aside if something rushed him. He kept darting glances to either side and over his shoulder, noting points of concealment and the distances to them. He got the impression that something of considerable size was following him, something that was wonderfully clever in making its swift moves from one bit of cover to the next,

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something of which he saw (or thought he saw) only the edges. One of the dogs? Or more than one? Perhaps urged by rapt-faced, fleet-footed little girls. Or...? He found himself picturing the dogs as spiders as furry and as big. Once in bed, her limbs and breasts pale in the dawn's first light, Cal had told him a dream in which two big borzoi following her had changed into two equally large and elegant creamy-furred spiders.

What if there were an earthquake now (he must be ready for *anything*), and the brown ground opened in smoking cracks and swallowed his pursuers up? And himself too?

He reached the foot of the crest and soon was circling past the Josephine Randall Junior Museum. His sense of being pursued grew less, or rather of being pursued at such close distance. It was good to be close to human habitations again, even if seemingly empty ones, and even though buildings were objects that things could hide behind. This was the place where they taught the boys and girls not to be afraid of rats and bats and giant tarantulas and other entities. Where were the children anyhow? Had some wise Pied Piper led them all away from this menaced locality? Or had they piled into the "Sidewalk Astronomer" panel truck and taken off for other stars? What with earthquakes and eruptions of large pale spiders and less wholesome entities, San Francisco was no longer very safe. Oh, you fool, watch, watch!

As he left the low building behind him and descended the hillside stairway and went past the tennis courts and finally reached the short dead-end cross street that was the boundary of Corona Heights, his nerves quieted down somewhat and his whirling thoughts too, though he got a dreadful start when he heard from somewhere a sharp squeal of rubber on asphalt and thought for a moment that the parked car at the other end of the cross street had started for him, steered by its two little tombstone headrests.

As he descended Beaver Street he began to encounter people at last, not many but a few. He remembered as if from another lifetime his intention to visit Byers (he'd even phoned) and debated whether to go through with it. He'd never been here before; his previous meetings in San Francisco with the man had been at a mutual friend's apartment in the Haight.

His mind was made up for him when an ambulance on Castro, which he'd just crossed, let loose with its yelping siren on approaching Beaver, and the foul, nerve-twanging sound growing suddenly unendurably loud as the vehicle

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crossed Beaver, fairly catapulted Franz up the steps to the faintly gold-arabesqued olive door and set him pounding the bronze knocker that was in the shape of a merman.

After a maddeningly long pause the polished brass knob turned, the door began to open, and a voice as grandiloquent as that of Vincent Price at his fruitiest said, "Here's a knocking indeed. Why, it's Franz Westen. Come in, come in. But you look shaken, my dear Franz, as if that ambulance had delivered you. What have the wicked, unpredictable streets done now?"

As soon as Franz was reasonably sure that the neatly bearded, rather theatric visage was Byers's, he pressed past him, saying, "Shut the door. I *am* shaken," while he scanned the richly furnished entry and the large glamorous room opening from it and the thickly carpeted stairs ahead going up to a landing mellow with light that had come through stained glass and the dark hall beyond the stairs.

Behind him, Byers was saying, "All in good time. There, it's locked, and I've even thrown a bolt, if that makes you feel better. And now some wine? Fortified, your condition would seem to call for. But tell me at once if I should call a doctor, so we won't have that fretting us."

They were facing each other now. Jaime Donaldus Byers was about Franz's age, somewhere in the midforties, medium tall, with the easy, proud carriage of an actor. He wore a pale green Nehru jacket faintly embroidered in gold, similar trousers, leather sandals, and a long, pale-violet dressing gown, open but belted with a narrow sash. His well-combed auburn hair hung to his shoulders. His Vandyke beard and narrow mustache were neatly trimmed. His palely sallow complexion, noble brow, and large liquid eyes were Elizabethan, suggesting Edmund Spenser. And he was fairly clearly aware of all this.

Franz, whose attention was still chiefly elsewhere, said, "No, no doctor. And no alcohol, this time, Donaldus. But if I could have some coffee, black...."

"My dear Franz, at once. Just come with me into the living room. Everything's there. But what is it that has shaken you? What's *chasing* you?"

"I am afraid," Franz said curtly and then added quickly, "of paramentals."

"Oh, is that what they're calling the big menace these days?" Byers said lightly, but his eyes had narrowed sharply first. "I'd thought it was the Mafia. Or the CIA. And there's Russia. I am only up to date sporadically. I live *firmly* in the world of art, where reality and fantasy are one."

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And he motioned Franz to select a seat, while he busied himself at a heavy table on which stood slender bottles and two small steaming urns.

The room was furnished sybaritically, and while not specifically Arabian, there was much more ornamentation than depiction. Franz chose a large hassock that was set against a wall and from which he had an easy view of the hall, the rear archway, and the windows, whose faintly glittering curtains transmitted yellowed sunlight and blurred, dully gilded pictures of the outdoors. Silver gleamed from two black shelves beside the hassock, and Franz's gaze was briefly held against his will (his fear) by a collection of small statuettes of modish young persons engaged with great hauteur in various sexual activities, chiefly perverse — the style between Art Deco and Pompeian. Under any other circumstances he would have given them more than a passing scrutiny. They looked incredibly detailed and devilishly expensive. Byers, he knew, came of a wealthy family and produced a sizable volume of exquisite poetry and prose sketches every three or four years.

Now that fortunate person set a thin, large white cup half filled with steaming coffee and also a steaming silver pot upon a firm low stand by Franz that additionally held an obsidian ashtray. Then he settled himself in a convenient low chair, sipped the pale yellow wine he'd brought, and said, "You said you had some questions when you phoned. About that journal you attribute to Smith? — and of which you sent me a photocopy."

Franz answered, his gaze still roving systematically. "That's right. I do have some questions for you. But first I've got to tell you what happened to me just now."

"Of course. By all means. I'm most eager to know."

Franz tried to condense his narrative, but soon found he couldn't do much of that without losing significance and ended by giving a quite full and chronological account of the events of the past 30 hours. As a result, and with some help from the coffee, which he'd needed, and from his cigarettes, which he'd forgotten to smoke for nearly an hour, he began after a while to feel a considerable catharsis, and his nerves settled down a great deal. He didn't find himself changing his mind about what had happened or its vital importance, but having a sympathetic listener certainly did make a great difference emotionally.

For Byers paid close attention, helping him on by little nods and eye-narrowings and pursings of lips and voiced brief agreements and

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comments — at least they were mostly brief. True, those last weren't so much practical as esthetic, even a shade frivolous, but that didn't bother Franz at all, at first — he was so intent on his story — while Byers, even when frivolous, seemed deeply impressed and far more than politely credulous about all Franz told him.

When Franz briefly mentioned the bureaucratic run-around he'd got, Byers caught the humor at once, putting in, "Dance of the clerks, how quaint!" And when he heard about Cal's musical accomplishments, he observed, "Franz, you have a sure taste in girls. A harpsichordist! What could be more perfect? My current dear-friend - secretary - playfellow - co-housekeeper - cum - moon - goddess is North Chinese, supremely erudite, and works in precious metals — she did those deliciously vile silvers, cast by the lost-wax process of Cellini. She'd have served you your coffee except it's one of our personal days, when we recreate ourselves apart. I call her Fa Lo Suee (the daughter of Fu Manchu — it's one of our semiprivate jokes) because she gives the delightfully sinister impression of being able to make over the world if ever she chose. You'll meet her if you stay this evening. Excuse me, please go on." And when Franz mentioned the astrological graffiti on Corona Heights, he whistled softly and said, "How *very* appropriate!" with such emphasis that Franz asked him, "Why?" but he responded, "Nothing. I mean the sheer *range* of our tireless defacers. Next: a pyramid of beer cans on Shasta's mystic top. Pray, continue."

But when Franz mentioned *Megapolisomancy* a third or fourth time and even quoted from it, Byers lifted a hand in interruption and went to a tall bookcase and unlocked it and took from behind the darkly clouded glass a thin book bound in black leather beautifully tooled with silver arabesques and handed it to Franz, who opened it.

It was a copy of de Castries' gracelessly printed book, identical with his own copy, as far as he could tell, save for the binding. He looked up questioningly.

Byers explained, "Until this afternoon I never dreamed you owned a copy, my dear Franz. You only showed me the violet-ink journal, you'll recall, that evening in the Haight, and later sent me a photocopy of the written-on pages. You never mentioned buying another book along with it. And on that evening you were, well...rather tiddly."

"In those days I was drunk all of the time," Franz said flatly.

"I understand...poor Daisy... say no more. The point is this: *Megapolisomancy* happens to be

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not only a rare book but also, literally, a very secret one. In his last years, de Castries had a change of mind about it and tried to hunt down every single copy and burn them all. And did! — almost. He was known to have behaved vindictively toward persons who refused to yield up their copies. He was, in fact, a very nasty and, I would say (except I abhor moral judgments), evil old man. At any rate, I saw no point at the time in telling you that I possessed what I thought then to be the sole surviving copy of the book."

Franz said, "Thank God! I was hoping you knew something about de Castries."

Byers said, "I know quite a bit. But first, finish your story. You were on Corona Heights, today's visit, and had just looked through your binoculars at the Transamerica Pyramid, which made you quote de Castries on 'our modern pyramids...'"

"I will," Franz said, and did it quite quickly, but it was the worst part. It brought vividly back to him his sight of the triangular pale-brown muzzle and his flight down Corona Heights, and by the time he was done he was sweating and darting his glance about again.

Byers let out a sigh, then said with relish, "And so you came to me, pursued by paramentals to the very door!" And he turned in his chair to look somewhat dubiously at the blurry golden windows behind him.

"Donaldus!" Franz said angrily, "I'm telling you things that happened, not some damn weird tale I've made up for your entertainment. I know it all hangs on a figure I saw several times at a distance of two miles with seven-power binoculars, and so anyone's free to talk about optical illusions and instrumental defects and the power of suggestion, but I know something about psychology and optics, and it was none of those!"

He finished icily, "Of course, it's quite possible I've gone insane, temporarily or permanently, and am 'seeing things,' but until I'm sure of that I'm not going to behave like a reckless idiot — or a hilarious one."

Donaldus, who had been making protesting and imploring faces at him all the while, now said injuredly and placatingly, "My *dear* Franz, I never for a moment doubted your seriousness or had the faintest suspicion that you were psychotic. Why, I've been inclined to believe in paramental entities ever since I read de Castries' book, and especially after hearing several circumstantial, very peculiar stories about him; and now your truly shocking eye-witness narrative has swept my last doubts away. But I've not seen one yet — if I did, I'm sure

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I'd feel all the terror you do and more — but until then, and perhaps in any case, and despite the proper horror they evoke in us, they are most *fascinating* entities, don't you agree? Now as for thinking your account a tale or story, my dear Franz, to be a good story is to me the highest test of the truth of anything. I make no distinction whatever between reality and fantasy, or the objective and the subjective. All life and all awareness are ultimately one, including intensest pain and death itself. Not all the play need please us, and ends are never comforting. Some things fit together harmoniously and beautifully and startlingly with thrilling discords — those are true — and some do not, and those are merely bad art. Don't you see?"

Franz had no immediate comment. He certainly hadn't given de Castries' book the least credence by itself, but...he nodded thoughtfully, though hardly in answer to the question. He wished for the sharp minds of Gun and Saul.

"And now to tell you *my* story," the other said, quite satisfied. "But first a touch of brandy — that seems called for. And you? Well, some hot coffee then, I'll fetch it. And a few biscuits? Yes."

Franz had begun to feel headachy and slightly nauseated. The plain arrowroot cookies, barely sweet, seemed to help. He poured himself coffee from the fresh pot, adding some of the cream and sugar his host had thoughtfully brought this time.

Donaldus said, "You have to keep in mind de Castries died when I (and you) were infants. Almost all my information comes from a couple of the not-so-close and hardly well-beloved friends of de Castries' last declining years, George Ricker, who was a locksmith and played *go* with him, and Herman Klaas, who ran a second-hand bookstore on Turk Street and was a sort of romantic anarchist and for a while a Technocrat. And a bit from Clark Ashton Smith. Ah, that interests you, doesn't it? It was only a bit — Clark didn't like to talk about de Castries. I think it was because of de Castries and his theories that Clark stayed away from big cities, even San Francisco, and became the hermit of Audubon and Pacific Grove. And I've got some data from old letters and clippings, but not much. People didn't like to write down things about de Castries, and they had reasons, and in the end the man himself made secrecy a way of life.

"Also," Donaldus continued, "I'll probably tell the story, at least in spots, in a somewhat poetic style. Don't let that put you off. It merely helps me organize my thoughts and select the significant items. I won't be straying in the least from the

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strict truth as I've discovered it. Though there may be traces of paramentals in my story, I suppose, and certainly one ghost. I think all modern cities, especially the crass, newly built, highly industrial ones, should have ghosts. They are a civilizing influence."

He took a generous sip of brandy, rolled it around his tongue appreciatively, and settled back in his chair.

"In 1900, as the century turned," he began dramatically, "Thibaut de Castries came to sunny, lusty San Francisco like a dark portent from realms of cold and coal smoke in the East that pulsed with Edison's electricity and from which thrust Sullivan's steel-framed skyscrapers. Madame Curie had just proclaimed radioactivity to the world, and Marconi radio spanning the seas. Madam Blavatsky had brought eerie theosophy from the Himalayas and passed on the occult torch to Annie Besant. The Scotch Astronomer-Royal Piazzi Smyth had discovered the history of the world and of its ominous future in the Grand Gallery of the Great Pyramid of Egypt. While in the law courts, Mary Baker Eddy and her chief female acolytes were hurling at each other accusations of witchcraft and black magic. Spencer preached science. Ingersoll thundered against superstition. Freud and Jung were plunging into the limitless dark of the subconscious. Wonders undreamed had been unveiled at the Universal Exhibition in Paris and at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. New York was digging her subways. Count von Zeppelin was launching his first dirigible airship, while the Wright brothers were readying for their first flight.

"De Castries brought with him only a large black Gladstone bag stuffed with copies of his ill-printed book that he could no more sell than Melville his *Moby Dick,* and a skull teeming with galvanic, darkly illuminating ideas, and (some insist) a large black panther on a leash of German silver links. He was a wiry, tireless, rather small black eagle of a man, with piercing eyes and sardonic mouth, who wore his glamor like an opera cape.

There were a dozen legends on his origins. Some said he improvised a new one each night and some that they were all invented by others solely on the inspiration of his darkly magnetic appearance. The one that Klaas and Ricker most favored was moderately spectacular: that as a boy of 13 during the Franco-Prussian war he had escaped from beseiged Paris by balloon along with his mortally wounded father, who was an explorer of darkest Africa, his father's beautiful and learned young Polish mistress, and a black pan-

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ther (an earlier one) which his father had originally captured in the Congo and which they had just rescued from the zoological gardens, where the starving Parisians were slaughtering the wild animals for food. (Of course, another legend had it that at that time he was a boy aide-de-camp to Garibaldi in Sicily and his father the most darkly feared of the Carbonari.) The balloon landing in the Egyptian desert near Cairo, he plunged at once into a study of the Great Pyramid, assisted by his father's Polish mistress (now his own) and by the fact that he was maternally descended from Champollion, decipherer of the Rosetta Stone. He made all Piazzi Smyth's discoveries (and a few more besides, which he kept secret) ten years in advance and laid the basis for his new science of supercities (and also his Grand Cipher) before leaving Egypt to investigate mega-structures and cryptoglyphics (he called it) and paramentality throughout the world.

"You know, that link with Egypt fascinates me," Byers said parenthetically as he poured himself more brandy. "It makes me think of Lovecraft's Nyarlathotep, who came out of Egypt to deliver pseudo-scientific lectures heralding the crumbling away of the world.

"At all events, de Castries had acquired a lot of dark, satanic charm from somewhere by the time he arrived at the City by the Golden Gate. He *was,* I'd guess, quite a bit like the satanist Anton La Vey (who kept a more-or-less tame lion for a while, did you know?) except that he had no desire for publicity. He was looking, rather, for an elite of scintillating, freethinking folk with a zest for life at its wildest — and if they had a lot of money, that wouldn't hurt a bit.

"And of course he found them! — the cream of the New World's freewheeling imaginative talent. Promethean (and Dionysian) Jack London. George Sterling, fantasy poet and romantic idol, favorite of the wealthy Bohemian Club set. Their friend, the brilliant defense attorney Earl Rogers, who later defended Clarence Darrow and saved his career. Ambrose Bierce, a bitter, becaped old eagle of a man himself, with his *Devil's Dictionary* and matchlessly terse horror tales. The poetess Nora May French. That mountain lioness of a woman, Charmion London. And those were only the more vitalic ones.

"And of course they fell upon de Castries with delight. He was just the sort of human curiosity they (and especially Jack London) loved. Mysterious cosmopolitan background, Munchausen anecdotes, weird and alarming scientific theories, a strong anti-industrial and (we'd say) anti-Establishment

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bias, the apocalyptic touch, the note of doom, hints of dark powers — he had them all! For quite a while he was their darling, their favorite guru of the left-handed path, almost (and I imagine he thought this himself) their new God. They even bought copies of his book and sat still (and drank) while he read from it. Prize egotists like Bierce put up with him, and London let him have stage center for awhile — he could afford to. And they were all quite ready to go along (in theory) with his dream of a utopia in which megapolitan buildings were forbidden (had been destroyed or somehow tamed) and paramentally put to benign use, with themselves the aristocratic elite and he the master spirit over all.

"The high point came when with much hush-hush and weedings out and secret messages and some rare private occult pomps and ceremonies, I suppose, he organized the Hermetic Order—"

"Is that the Hermetic Order that Smith, or the journal, mentions?" Franz interrupted. He had been listening with a mixture of fascination, irritation, and wry amusement, with at least half his attention clearly elsewhere, but he had grown more attentive at mention of the Grand Cipher.

"It is," Byers nodded. "I'll explain. In England at that time there was a Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult society with members like the mystic poet Yeats, who talked with vegetables and bees and lakes, and Dion Fortune and George Russell — A.E. — and your beloved Arthur Machen."

Franz nodded impatiently, restraining his impulse to say "Get on with it, Donaldus!"

The other got the point. "Well, anyhow," he continued, "In 1898 Aleister Crowley managed to join the Gilded Dayspringers (nice, eh?) and almost broke up the society by his demands for Satanistic rituals, black magic, and other real tough stuff.

"In imitation, but also as a sardonic challenge, de Castries called his society the Hermetic Order of the Onyx Dusk. He is said to have worn a large black ring of *pietra dura* work with a bezel of mosaicked onyx, obsidian, ebony, and black opal polished flat, depicting a predatory black bird, perhaps a raven.

"It was at this point that things began to go wrong for de Castries and that the atmosphere became, by degrees, very nasty.

"As nearly as I can reconstruct it, this is what happened. As soon as his secret society had been constituted, Thibaut revealed to its handful of highly select members that his utopia was not a far-off dream, but an immediate prospect,

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and that it was to be achieved by violent revolution, both material and spiritual (that is, paramental), and that the chief and at first sole instrument of that revolution was to be the Hermetic Order of the Onyx Dusk.

"This violent revolution was to begin with acts of terrorism somewhat resembling those the Nihilists were carrying out in Russia at that time (just before the abortive Revolution of 1905), but with a lot of new sort of black magic (his megapolisomancy) thrown in. Demoralization rather than slaughter was to be the aim, at least at first. Black-powder bombs were to be set off in public places and on the roofs of big buildings during the deserted hours of the night. Other big buildings were to be plunged into darkness by locating and throwing their main switches. Anonymous letters and phone calls would heighten the hysteria.

"But more important would be the megapolisomantic operations, which would cause 'buildings to crumple to rubble, people to go screaming mad, until every last soul is in panic flight from San Francisco, choking the roads and foundering the ferries' — at least that's what Klaas said de Castries confided to him many years later while in a rare communicative mood.

"These magical or pseudo-scientific acts (what would you call them?) would require absolute obedience on the part of Thibaut's assistants — which was the next demand Thibaut seems to have made of every last one of his acolytes in the Hermetic Order of the Onyx Dusk. One of them would be ordered to go to a specific address in San Francisco at a specified time and simply stand there for two hours, blanking his (or her) mind, or else trying to hold one thought. Or he'd be directed to take a bar of copper or a small box of coal or a toy balloon filled with hydrogen to a certain floor of a certain big building and simply leave it there (the balloon against the ceiling), again at a specified time. Apparently the elements were supposed to act as catalysts. Or two of three of them would be commanded to meet in a certain hotel lobby or at a certain park bench and just sit there together without speaking for half an hour. And everyone would be expected to obey every order unquestioningly and unhesitatingly, in exact detail, or else there would be (I suppose) various chilling Carboniar-style penalties and reprisals.

"Thibaut seems to have thought that there was, or that he had invented, a kind of mathematics whereby minds and big buildings (and paramental entities?) could be manipulated. Neopythagorean

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metageometry, he called it. It was all a question of knowing the right times and *spots* (he'd quote Archimedes' 'Give me a place to stand and I will move the world') and then conveying there the right person (and mind) or material object. Once, he started to outline in detail to Klaas a single act of megapolisomancy — give him the formula for it, so to speak — but then he got suspicious.

"Well, you can imagine how those prima donnas that he'd recruited reacted to all this. Conceivably Jack London and George Sterling might have gone through with things like the light-switch business for a lark, if they'd been drunk enough when Thibaut asked them. And even crochety old Bierce might have enjoyed a little mysterious black-powder thunder, if someone else did all the work and set it off. But when he asked them to do *boring* things he wouldn't explain, it was much too much. A dashing and eccentric society lady who was a great beauty (and an acolyte) is supposed to have said, 'If only he'd asked me to do something *challenging*, such as appear naked in the rotunda of the City of Paris and then swim out to Seal Rocks and chain myself to them like Andromeda. But just to stand in front of the public library thinking of the South Pole and saying nothing for an hour and twenty minutes — I *ask* you, darling!"

"When it got down to cases, you see, they must simply have refused to take him seriously, either his revolution or his new black magic.

"At any rate, they all refused to help him make even a test-run of his mega-magic. Or perhaps a few of them went along with it once or twice and nothing happened.

"I suppose that at this point he lost his temper and began to thunder orders and invoke penalties. And they just laughed at him — and when he wouldn't see that the game was over and kept up with it, simply walked away from him.

"Or took more active measures. I can imagine someone like London simply picking up the furious, spluttering little man by his coat collar and the seat of his pants and pitching him out.

"Something like that could have completed the transformation of Thibaut de Castries from a fascinating freak whom one humored into an unpleasant old bore, trouble maker, borrower, *and blackmailer*, against whom one protected oneself by whatever measures were necessary. Yes, Franz, there's the persistent rumor that he tried to and in some cases did blackmail his former disciples by threatening to reveal scandals he had learned about in the days when they were free with each other, or simply that they had been members

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of a terrorist organization — his own! Twice at this time he seems to have disappeared completely for several months, very likely because he was serving jail sentences — something several of his ex-acolytes were powerful enough to have managed easily, though I've never been able to track down an instance, so many records were destroyed in the Quake.

"But some of the old dark glamor must have lingered about him for quite a while in the eyes of his ex-acolytes — the feeling that he was a being with sinister, paranatural powers — for when the Earthquake did come very early in the morning of April 18th, 1906, thundering up Market in brick and concrete waves from the west and killing its hundreds, one of his lapsed acolytes, probably recalling his intimations of a magic that would topple skyscrapers, is supposed to have said, 'He's done it! The old devil's *done it!*'

"But mostly my information for this period is very sketchy and one-sided. The people who'd known him best were all trying to forget him (suppress him, you might say), while my two chief informants, Klaas and Ricker, knew him only as an old man in the 1920's and had heard only his side (or sides!) of the story. They both indignantly rejected the blackmail stories and the even nastier rumors that came later on: that de Castries was devoting his declining years to getting revenge on his betrayers by somehow doing them to death or suicide by black magic."

"I know about some of them," Franz said. "What happened to Nora May French?"

"She was the first to go. In 1907. A clear case of suicide."

"And when did Sterling die?"

"November 17th, 1926."

Franz said thoughtfully, though still not lost in thought, "There certainly seems to have been a suicidal drive at work, though operating over a period of twenty years. A good case can be made out that it was a death wish that drove Bierce to go to Mexico when he did — a war-haunted life, so why not such a death? — and probably attach himself to Pancho Villa's rebels as a sort of unofficial revolution-correspondent and most likely get himself shot as an uppity old gringo who wouldn't stay silent for the devil himself. While Sterling was known to have carried a vial of cyanide in his vest pocket for years, whether he finally took it by accident (pretty far-fetched) or by intention. And then there was that time (Rogers' daughter tells about it in her book) when Jack London disappeared on a five-day spree and then came home where Charmion and Rogers' daughter and several other worried people were gather-

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ed and with the mischievous, icy logic of a man who'd drunk himself sober, he challenged George Sterling and Earl Rogers to agree *not to sit up with the corpse.* Though I'd think alcohol was enough villain there, without bringing in any of de Castries' black magic, or its power of suggestion."

"What'd London mean by that?" Byers asked, squinting as he carefully measured out for himself more brandy.

"That when they felt life losing its zest, their powers starting to fail, they take the Noseless One by the arm without waiting to be asked, and exit laughing."

"The Noseless One?"

"Why, simply, London's sobriquet for Death himself — the skull beneath the skin. The nose is all cartilage and so the skull—"

Byers' eyes widened and he shot a finger toward his guest.

"Franz!" he asked excitedly, "That paramental you saw — wasn't it noseless?"

As if he'd just received a post-hypnotic command, Franz's eyes shut tight, he jerked back his face a little, and started to throw up his hands in front of it. Byers' words had brought the pale-brown, blank, triangular face vividly back to his mind's eye.

"Don't," he said carefully, "say things like that again without warning. Yes, it was noseless."

"My dear Franz, I will not. Please excuse me. I did not fully realize until now what effect the sight of it must have upon a person."

"All right, all right," Franz said quietly. "So four acolytes died somewhat ahead of their times (except perhaps for Bierce), victims of their rampant psyches...or of something else."

"And at least an equal number of the less prominent acolytes," Byers took up again quite smoothly. "You know, Franz, I've always been impressed by how in London's last great novel *The Star Rover* mind triumphs completely over matter. By frightfully intense self-discipline a lifer at San Quentin is enabled to escape in spirit through the thick walls of his prison and move at will though the world and relive his past reincarnations, re-die his deaths. Somehow that makes me think of old de Castries in the 1920's, living alone in downtown cheap hotels and brooding, brooding, brooding about past hopes and glories and disasters. And (dreaming the while of foul unending tortures) about the wrongs done to him and about revenge (whether or not he actually worked something there) and about...who knows what else? sending his mind upon...who knows what journeys?

"During this period we must picture him as a bent old man,

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taciturn most of the time, always depressed, and getting paranoid. For instance, now he had a thing about never touching metal surfaces and fixtures, because his enemies were trying to electrocute him. Sometimes he was afraid they were poisoning his tap water in the pipes. He seldom would go out, for fear a car would jump the curb and get him, and he no longer spry enough to dodge, or an enemy would shatter his skull with a brick or tile dropped from a high roof. At the same time he was frequently changing his hotel, to throw them off his trail. Now his only contacts with former associates were his dogged attempts to get back and burn all copies of his book, though there may still have been some blackmailing and plain begging. Ricker and Klaas witnessed one such book burning. Grotesque affair! — he burned two copies in his bathtub. They remembered opening the windows and fanning out the smoke. With one or two exceptions, they were his only visitors — lonely and eccentric types themselves and already failed men like himself although they were only in their thirties at the time.

"Then Clark Ashton Smith came, the same age, but brimming with poetry and imagination and creative energy. He'd been hard hit by George Sterling's nasty death and had felt driven to look up such friends and acquaintances of his poetic mentor as he could find. De Castries felt old fires stir. Here was another of the brilliant, vitalic ones he'd always sought. He was tempted (finally yielding entirely) to exert his formidable charm for a last time, to tell his fabulous tales, to expand compellingly his eerie theories, and to weave his spells.

"And Clark Ashton Smith, a lover of the weird and of its beauty, highly intelligent, yet in some ways still a naive small-town youth, emotionally turbulent, made a most gratifying audience. For several weeks Clark delayed his return to Auburn, fearfully reveling in the ominous, wonder-shot, strangely *real* world that old Tiberius, the scarecrow emperor of terror and mysteries, painted for him afresh each day — a San Francisco of spectral though rock-solid mega-buildings and invisible paramental entities more real than life. It's easy to see why the Tiberius metaphor caught Clark's fancy. At one point he wrote — Hold on for a moment, Franz, while I get that photo-copy—"

"There's no need," Franz said, dragging the journal itself out of his side pocket. The binoculars came out with it and dropped to the thickly carpeted floor with a shivery little clash of the broken glass inside.

Byers' eyes followed them with

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morbid curiosity. "So those are the glasses that (take warning, Franz!) several times saw a paramental entity and were in the end destroyed by it." His gaze shifted to the journal. "Franz, you sly dog! You came prepared for at least part of this discussion before you ever went to Corona Heights today!"

Franz picked up the binoculars and put them on the low table beside his overflowing ashtray, meanwhile glancing rapidly around the room and at its windows, where the gold had darkened a little. He said quietly, "It seems to me, Donaldus, you've been holding out too. You take for granted now that Smith wrote the journal, but in the Haight and even in the letters we exchanged afterwards, you said you were uncertain."

"You've got me," Byers admitted with a rather odd little smile, perhaps ashamed. "But it really seemed *wise*, Franz, to let as few people in on it as possible. Now of course you know as much as I do, or will in a few minutes, but....The most camp of cliches is 'There are some things man was not meant to know,' but there are times when I believe it really applies to Thibaut de Castries and the paranatural. Might I see the journal?"

Franz flipped it across. Byers caught it as if it were made of eggshell, and with an aggrieved look at his guest carefully opened it and as carefully turned a couple of pages. "Yes, here it is. 'Three hours today at 607 Rhodes. What a locus for genius! How prosaick! — as Howard would spell it. And yet Tiberius is Tiberius indeed, miserly doling out his dark Thrasyllus-secrets in this canyoned, cavernous Capri called San Francisco to his frightened young heir (God, no! Not I!) Caligula. And wondering how soon I too will go mad.'"

As he finished reading aloud, Byers began to turn the next pages, one at a time, and kept it up even when he came to the blank ones. Now and then he'd look up at Franz, but he examined each page minutely with fingers and eyes before he turned it.

He said conversationally, "Clark did think of San Francisco as a modern Rome, you know, both cities with their seven hills. From Auburn he'd seen George Sterling and the rest living as if all life were a Roman holiday. With Carmel perhaps analogous to Capri, which was simply Tiberius' Little Rome, for the more advanced fun and games. Fishermen brought fresh-caught lobsters to the goatish old emperor; Sterling dove for giant abalone with his knife. Of course, Rhodes was the Capri of Tiberius' early middle years. No, I can see why Clark would not have wanted to be Caligula. 'Art, like the bartender, is never drunk' — or really

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schiz. Hello, what's this?"

His fingernails were gently teasing at the edge of a page. "It's clear you're not a bibliophile, dear Franz. I should have gone ahead and stolen the book from you that evening in the Height, as at one point I fully intended to, except that something gallant in your drunken manner touched my conscience, which is never a good guide to follow. There!"

With the ghostliest of cracklings the page came apart into two, revealing writing hidden between.

He reported, "It's black as new — India ink for certain — but done very lightly so as not to groove the paper in the slightest. Then a few tiny drops of gum arabic, not enough to wrinkle, and — hey presto! — it's hidden quite neatly. The obscurity of the obvious. 'Upon their vestments is a writing no man may see...' *Oh, dear me, no!*"

He resolutely averted his eyes, which had been reading while he spoke. Then he stood up and holding the journal at arm's length came over and squatted on his hams, so close beside Franz that his brandy breath was obvious, and held the newly liberated page spread before their faces. Only the right-hand one was written upon, its very black yet spider-fine characters very neatly drawn and not remotely like Smith's handwriting.

"Thank you," Franz said. "This is weird. I riffled through those pages a dozen times."

"But you did not examine each one minutely with the true bibliophile's profound mistrust. The signatory initials indicate it was written by old Tiberius himself. And I'm sharing this with you not so much out of courtesy, as fear. Glancing at the opening, I got the feeling this was something I did not want to read all by myself."

Together they silently read the following:

A CURSE upon Master Clark Ashton Smith and all his heirs, who thought to pick my brain and slip away, false fleeting agent of my old enemies. Upon him the Long Death, the paramental agony! when he strays back as all men do. The fulcrum (0) and the Cipher (A) shall be here, at his *beloved* 607 Rhodes. I'll be at rest in my appointed spot (1) under the Bishop's Seat, the heaviest ashes that he ever felt. Then when the weights are on at Sutro Mount (4) and Monkey Clay (5) [(4) + (1) = (5)] *BE his Life Squeezed Away.* Committed to Cipher in my 50-Book (A). Go out, my little book (B), into the world, and lie in wait in stalls and lurk on shelves for the unwary purchaser. Go out, my little book, and break some necks!

(to be concluded next month)

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A wild, wild, extrapolation of graffiti, *of all things, from (who else?) R. A. Lafferty, whose imagination flies in higher and stranger places than most of ours.*

Thou Whited Wall

by R. A. LAFFERTY

False coinage will always drive true coinage to the wall, as it were.

— *Tully Ficticius*

"The wall washers are coming rather late tonight," Evangeline Gilligan said. "Oh, I can see that it's going to be one of those days! It's already four thirty in the morning by Eastern time. They're doing a good job though. Ah, but it's nice to be a guided person and have so much working for you. Who will hit the wall first today?"

"The smart money's on the Rooky Duke," said Evangeline's husband Mudge Gilligan. "But the smart money was also on Northside Public in Chicago for the wall of the night, and it turns out to be the Great North Wall of the men's room of Monorail Central in Atlanta." Mudge recognized walls more readily than Evangeline did.

The wall washers came every late night or early morning to clean and white all the big-name walls of the country. They went over those walls with their sophisticated paint-washes and their broad electric brushes. They obliterated every picture and scribble from those walls and left the stark and challenging surfaces in their clean emptiness. It was always a question which would be the prime wall for a coming day (this information was never leaked) and which of the prophetic artists would score first hit on the designated wall with his message. Many local people watched local walls and guided their lives by the messages that appeared on them. But the wide world watched the prime wall.

But there were always marks breaking through on the walls between the time of the wall washing and the hit of the first prophet. It was the case of the stronger of yesterday's drawings and writings

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fighting their way out through those paint-washes and splaying themselves black and beetling on the new clean surface. There was a never-say-die spirit to the more meaningful of the old drawings, writhing and fighting their was through. And they changed in their struggles. Comparative pictures showed that the graphia were somewhat different in their emerging state from what they had been when they were submerged by the wall washing.

And then the new day's pictures and scribbles began to appear even before human hands could reach the wall. And this day, as revealed by the vision-set from Atlanta, the Rooky Duke scored first.

"Good!" Mudge Gilligan cried out as he watched. "I'm always afraid of the Rook, but if he's first he can't hurt me. I've got the third tonight, and if that had been the Rook I'd probably have died. There's only one worse than the Rooky Duke for me this session, the way the fates are falling."

Quite often lately, the Rooky Duke had been scoring first, with electric or ectoplasmic hands. The cameras caught a little bit of the fogginess of such ghost hands that splashed their signatures and messages on prime walls before the surge of great-name but purely human artists could reach them.

The Rooky Duke had left his flaming message there, and it meant the deaths of very many people. But Mudge Gilligan was not riding on the Rook for a first.

The Putty Dwarf scored immediately after.

"Two down!" Mudge cried in half relief and half fear. "That's two of the three who might have killed me. And I have the next coming up, but the odds are strong against all three of my worst death-threats coming up the first three." Mudge shook though, as if the odds were a little bit closer on the thing.

"Why do you take such risks, dear?" Evangeline asked her husband. "I'd think it would worry you sick."

"It does. But there's a pretty good sum of money in the pot by this time. Only one in the pot can win and it's got to be me soon. There's only five of us left."

"And only one in the pot can lose — can lose his life, that is," Evangeline said, "and it's got to be you soon. Why did you join up this time?"

"You remember the fortune I got —

Live dangerously,
reap the stuff,
and die if you
lack luck enough.

And, Evangeline, nobody can escape his fortune, and four men have already died in it, and the pot has built up to twelve dollars. It's

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worth the risk. What other chance have I to avoid being a poor man all my life?"

The Rooky Duke and the Putty Dwarf had already hit. And now the third prophet hit —

"Oh, no, no!" Mudge howled in terror as he recognized the third ghostly hand that was writing on the camera'd wall.

"Is he really so bad for you, dear?" Evangeline asked.

"He is the death of me," Mudge moaned, for the third of the prophets to score was the Gloaty Throat.

"At least read the message," Evangeline urged. "It might not be death after all."

But the handwriting on the wall read:

> Anoint your head and leave your brood,
> and use what came in the breakfast food.

This message didn't mean a lot to the millions of viewers, but it came through strong to Mudge Gilligan.

"All I can do is make an end to it," Mudge whimpered. He knew that his little boy Hiero had got a vein opener in the last box of breakfast food and that the Gloaty Throat was referring to it.

"This is good-by, Evangeline," he said.

"Don't touch me, please," she protested. "Your hands are always so sweaty when you are scared, and you are so acid. You know I don't like you to touch me when your hands are sweaty."

Mudge Gilligan went quickly and anointed his head. Then he got Hiero's vein opener and he opened his veins and died.

"Oh, I can see that this is going to be one of those days," Evangeline said.

With the real mind explosion, most of the more intelligent people had gone beyond high astrology and had begun to tie their fortunes to the handwriting on the walls, to the pictures, to the messages. And the Handwriting on the Wall had already become a great and established institution. As the only prehuman graphic communication, it had always remained somewhat monkey-handed, and its prophetic element had not become soaringly interspecies. It was real understanding, the stuff that was splashed on the walls and became psycho-dyked there. This was gut-art. This was what the great Charles Puncheon had called transcendent drivel. This was seraphic scribbling. And it was creative prediction.

The emphasis on wall writing was not to abrogate high astrology but to fulfill it. All the great prophet-artists of the whited walls *are* planetary personages, and all

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the scientific backing of high astrology applies to transcendent wall writing also.

No good name had ever been found to describe the excellence and many-leveled meaning of this testimony on the walls. It had been called kakographia and syngramma and scribble-schnibble. It had been called zographia and ektyposis and ochsenscheiber. It had been called chromatisma and schediasma and oscenite. It had been called scherzi and motti and asynartesia. The Italians have called it graffita, and the name may have stuck.

But it became more than just a complex of things that dirty little boys wrote on walls. Now it was things that dirty big boys wrote, and these boys were the prophetic artist-heroes who came to the top by power and genius and scheming and creative duplicity and murder.

The twelve zodiacal signs had once been "set" things that were not subject to change. But the twelve prophets of the whited walls were twelve kings of the mountains who came to the top and flung others down to their destruction. They were the reincarnations of the prophets of the twelve tribes of Israel; they were the embodiments of the twelve planets; they were the twelve apostles; and they were the twelve signs from the sky. These mighty ones accepted every challenge, and many of them lived at the apex for several years. There were no living, former members of this highest circle of the prophetic artists: to fall from the twelve was to fall to death.

At this time, the high twelve were: The Rooky Duke, the Putty Dwarf, the Tutti Fruit, the Demogorgon, the Braggin Dragon, the Gloaty Throat, the Creature Preacher, Joe Snow, the Spanish Fly, Hu Flung, the Moving Finger, and the Turning Worm.

"Mother, father has opened his veins and bled to death all over everything," small son Hiero Gilligan was hollering. Hiero's early stridence always gave an unpleasant cast to a morning.

"Yes, dear," his mother Evangeline told him, "but be tolerant. It is his personal privilege."

"Personal privilege nothing!" Hiero exploded. "I never said that papa could use my vein opener. He should have asked me first. I wish people would leave my things alone."

"I'll get you another one if you really want to use it, dear," Evangeline offered.

"No, I wouldn't want to use it now," Hiero pouted. "The shine's all gone off the idea."

The Gilligans had given their little boy Hiero everything, but he had always been hard to please.

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There were those (unguided persons all) who said that the walls and all their fruits were nonsense and that the science behind the prophetic messages was pseudo-science. These unguided folks said that the guided persons were probably insane and that they were wrecking the very apparatus of society with their agressive ignorance. They said that production had already broken down because of the great numbers of unproductive wall watchers and that already there were not enough of the necessities to go around to everybody.

Well, no, there wasn't enough for everybody, but there was enough for the guided people. They had their power and their numbers. Who was going to dispute them, the fortune-cookie people?

The Spanish Fly had just hit the prime wall, and it was carried to all the other big-name walls. The Fly could not hit in a number of places at one time, as could the Rooky Duke or the Putty Dwarf or the Gloaty Throat. These were camera reproductions of the Fly message on the secondary walls. He wasn't a mulit-presence entity. He hadn't either electric or ectoplasmic hands. He had to be at the wall he actually hit. So he was at the Great North Wall of the men's room of Monorail Central in Atlanta. But the Spanish Fly did have successive bodies. He had to have. He used up a body every time he hit.

He had hit now on the prime wall with a sudden and spectacular splotch of blood and viscera. And the great blotch was himself entire: the blotch *was* the Spanish Fly. The gory stuff slid down the wall and it spelled out its message as it did so:

I am an insect spilled;
this is my all.
I in my red, fulfilled
on whited wall.

There was always a wistful tone to the Spanish Fly's death messages, and there was a wonder how he was able to spell out the message when he came to his last extremity. His enduring classic communication, of course, had been those slow-beat words:

Blood, bone, gore, pith,
reek and rot.
Here I go with
all I've got.

But death splatterings lose a little of their excellence when they are repeated every night or morning.

The Spanish Fly always said that he was really the planet Mercury, but in his present manifestation he had been born in Spain, Idaho. Jealous and edged-tooth persons said that his use of the throwaway bodies was a conjure and a trick.

"Who's going to bury papa?" Hiero Gilligan asked his mother.

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"I don't know," she said. "Maybe I will have an intuition on how to get it done."

"Who are you on this morning?"

"I'm playing a double. The Demogorgon and Joe Snow."

"But you aren't smart enough to play a double, mama."

Hu Flung had hit. Hu Flung's messages were always in the medium of thrown ordure. It globbed on the wall, and the words it spelled out were always gross.

The Demogorgon hit. The Demogorgon was probably the least of the reigning twelve. Only a sustained rumor as to who he really was gave him any stature at all. And his messages didn't mean much to the multitude, but this one meant a little bit to Evangeline:

Oh bury your dead
and run and run!
But where will you head
for luck and Fun?

"Well where *will* you head to find them, mama?" Hiero asked.

"I don't know. I'll intuit something in a little while. Who are you on today?"

"The Braggin Dragon."

A dozen challengers from the stratum below the High Twelve had hit on the Great North Wall in Atlanta, the prime wall of the day. And ten thousand other challengers had hit on a thousand other walls. Oh, the world would never run out of talent with so many powerful ones rising like giant waves every morning. Most of these were one-timers, but some of them had sustained power.

Joe Snow hit!

But Joe was always a time bomb. His hits were delayed messages. He hit with snow-shot, white on white, and his messages could not be read immediately. But his communications always caused flurries of intuitions in all who were on him for that day. And later in the day, when the whited walls had become dirty and speckled, his messages could be read as they stood out in stark white from dingy gray.

"I have an intuition from Joe Snow," Evangeline said, and she rose to follow it.

"But your intuitions on Snow are always wrong," the little boy Hiero argued, "and when the messages finally come clear, they are never anything like you guessed."

"Never mind," said Evangeline. "I have to start somewhere, and I will start with this intuition."

Evangeline went by the place of Violet Anemone Rhodina, a widow-woman of the town.

"Your roses look bad, Vi," Evangeline told her. "I believe that there is something a little bit

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lacking in them. I've been worrying about them."

"And your psychology seems to be a little bit lacking, Ev," Violet said. "What do you want from me and how much will it put me out?"

"Like all the guided people, I am a giver and not a taker," Evangeline said. "Do you know when it was that your roses looked the best they ever have? It was in the months after you buried your husband in your rose garden."

"Yes, of course. He gave my garden three flourishing years. There was never a man with so much to contribute as my husband. The earth is richer for him."

"My own husband died about half an hour ago, Vi. I think he made a mistake, but he went by his own free choice. Now, I was wondering whether —"

"I'm afraid that he's too acid, Ev. He always looked like a very acidic man to me, and too much acid isn't good for roses."

"Oh, no, Vi. I don't believe he was ever acid at all."

"Didn't his hands used to sweat a lot? Wasn't he a compulsive gambler? Both may be signs of a highly acid condition."

"Oh, what will I do with him? What will I do?" Evangeline moaned.

"I'd like to help you, Ev, and I'm willing to be convinced. If you can bring me a certificaate that his condition wasn't overly acidic, then of course you can bury him in my rose garden."

"Oh, I will try to get a certificate from someone today," Evangeline said. Then she went by Gimbal's where she worked. She hadn't been by there very often lately, but she thought that someone there might help her through a bad day.

"Oh, I fired you a week ago, Mrs. Gilligan," Selkirk Gimbal told her. "I'd have told you before, but you haven't been in here since I fired you. Don't look at me so blank. You don't work here any more. You never seem to comprehend what I say, but how else can I tell you that you're fired and that you don't work here any more?"

"That's your problem, Selkirk. We guided persons never have any trouble in expressing ourselves. I'm going to have to take a few days off. I have a husband to dispose of, and I have all sorts of intuitions to sort out. And I'm going down to Atlanta today to examine the prime wall of record. I'll try to get in here a little while next week."

"No hurry, Evangeline. You don't work here any more."

"I'll forgive you for that remark, Selkirk, remembering that you are an unguided person."

"It may be that we unguided persons get along as well as you guided ones."

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"Of course you don't get along as well as we do, Selkirk. Notice yourselves sometime. You simply don't have our depth. We guided ones are the prestressed people, and we can never be unbalanced. And we have our power."

The guided people of the walls had been given twelve extra sensators-at-large, one for the followers of each prophet-artist. This gave, almost always, a special tilt in affairs towards the guided people. And they had been given many other things.

The unguided persons were those who did not order their lives according to the handwriting on the walls. They hadn't the scientific understanding to bring them to that. They hadn't the planetary disposition for it. In every society there will be the guided elites, and there will be the unguided commonality. And the whited walls, those screens for projecting things from beyond by means of the artist-prophets, were the guides for the guided.

About midday, Evangeline received a report that might have been disquieting to her if she had not been one of the guided ones. She learned that her small son Hiero, along with three companions, had opened a new option kit that was to have been the gift to one of them for his next name day. This option kit was a very sophisticated one and should not have been given to small children without caution. But they had opened it and they had played with it. And all four of them had optioned out. Of course, self-destruction is a personal privilege for persons of all ages, but the act itself is peculiarly poignant with small children.

All four of the boys were on the Braggin Dragon that day. That might be significant.

They all looked nice though, as Evangeline was told, and each of them held in his little dead hand one of those motto flags such as come in those kits, with the words *It's a world I never made.*

"It's too bad that children have to grow up so soon," Evangeline said to herself. And then it seemed that her lament was incorrect since Hiero hadn't really grown up at all.

"Oh, certainly, it's all right," Violet Rhodina said. "I'm letting them bury all four of the little boys in my rose garden. Little boys are seldom hyperacidic."

Evangeline Gilligan took a fly-by to Atlanta. She wanted to see the wall of the day.

In Atlanta at Monorail Central she came upon the Demogorgon himself sorrowfully drinking coffee and eating a roll and a bowl of squid brains at one of the terminal cafes.

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"I always thought you were a natural," she jibed, "and here you are eating squid brains."

"I am an *un*-natural," the Demogorgon said, "but I have a right to these. These are devil-fish brains, and I am the devil himself."

The Demogorgon had always insisted, in the face of derision and disbelief, that he was the one and original devil and as such was unnatural and antinatural. Some of the great prophet-artists were natural in their gifts; but some used artificial enhancement, either special diet or brain surgery, to build up their talents. The surgery always removed several pounds of brain matter that might prove distracting to the talents, and it introduced other matter from the organs and brains of other species and from rogue humans. The special diets consisted of daily eating of these same types of organs and brains. The highest item on the diet lists was squid brains.

The squids, living in it entirely, had a finer understanding of the great oceanic unconscious than had people of any other species. And the squids also had a primordial understanding of writing on walls. Their inky ejections were true communication-writing, and they *did* have whited walls very deep in the oceans that they wrote upon with their propelled ink. The squids are not a degenerate species that writes sequentially one letter or one word after another. They eject an entire gloopy message at one time upon the walls.

"Who are you on today?" the Demogorgon mouthed around a glob of brains.

"Yourself and Joe Snow," Evangeline told him. "He's the second half of my daily double."

"There's always a delay about Joe," the Demogorgon said. "His messages are not clear till a contrasting background builds up. And even after they are clear, they still are not very clear. Why doesn't everyone get on me alone? I'm the best of them all. I am pleased to see that you have had troubles today."

"Not bad ones. Or not good ones, as it would be from your viewpoint. You really are the devil, aren't you? It's just that the man I work for keeps telling me that I'm fired, and it's just that my husband died this morning from a foolish antic and I have no place to bury him. He has an acid condition, I think, and that's bad for some plants. People won't let you bury an acid man in their gardens."

"Aren't there any necrophagists in your town? They are likely breaking down the doors of your place right now to feed on him. They don't mind acidity."

"They're too particular lately though. They'd eat a few choice parts of him and then I'd be stuck

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with the rest. And the dogs are almost as bad. There's so many parts that they like to play with but won't eat up."

"Consider lilac bushes," the really devil said. "Consider blueberry shrubs. I must go now. I have to oppress widows and orphans and defraud laborers. And there's several small children of both sexes that I must rape. It's an old pleasure that's coming back into favor. And take a careful look at my own latest message on the wall. It's rather excellent. Bad-bye, madam."

"You are outmoded. You know that," Evangeline said. "And you're outrotted in so many ways."

"It's a case of the false coin driving out the true again," the Demogorgon said.

Evangeline went down to view the Great North Wall. She had to wear a man's hat to go down there: that was the rule. They had hats available at a little booth.

Oh, there is always so much of the local prophetic-art in Atlanta and places like that. But some of it is good. Persons were at work with cameras and scanners and code breakers and calculators on many of the messages, squeezing the last drop of guidance out of them.

The message of Joe Slow was still there on the prime wall. The background of it had darkened somewhat, but it was still too much white-on-white to be read. And Joe Snow himself was there.

"How good are lilac bushes for an acid husband?" Evangeline asked him. "How good are blueberry shrubs?"

"Rhubarb is the best," Joe Snow said thickly. Joe was snowed.

"Why didn't I think of rhubarb? When will the background of your message darken enough to make it readable?" Evangeline asked. "I've got to catch a fly-by home in an hour."

"Perhaps the message won't be readable today at all," the thick-tongued Joe Snow mumbled. "Amateur artists are careless and they are writing over my message. I try to chase them away, but as the afternoon goes on I get sleepy and then there is no one to chase them off. But imprint my message on your mind and hold it there. The snow-colored message itself will not darken, but your mind will become gray and grimy by evening. The contrast will enable you to read it."

"Thank you," Evangeline said. "Things are much easier when one avails herself of guidance."

Evangeline then had a liaison and affair with a gentleman who was also on Joe Snow and the Demogorgon for the daily double. The liaison and affair took something more than half an hour. Then

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Evangeline caught a fly-by to go back home.

And when she was back in her home city, she went immediately to Reuben's Rhubarb Patch.

"I have an acid husband," she told Reuben. "And, oh, your rhubarb does look as if it needs acid!"

"That's my poke-weed patch," Reuben said. "This is my rhubarb on the other side. Oh, bring him along and bury him, I guess. He can't hurt the soil much." So the remains of Mudge Gilligan were quickly buried at Reuben's.

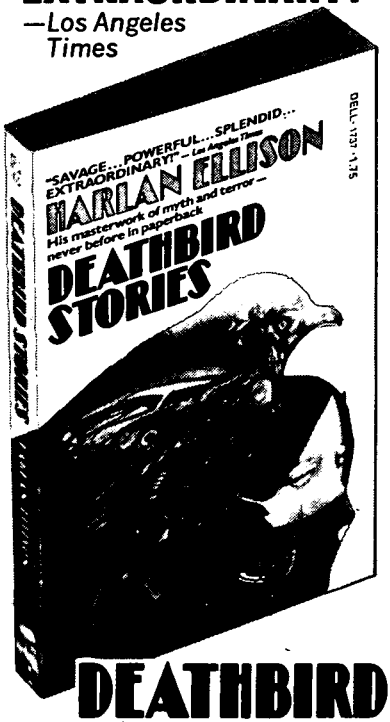
"Oh, how right everything is going today!" Evangeline chortled. "And I thought that things would be bad. I guess that things almost always go right for guided persons. I may as well settle my other problem."

She went by the place where she worked.

"I have decided to forgive you for your bad manners of today, Selkirk," she told the man she worked for. "You are an unguided person, so I must make allowances. But you know how much trouble you'd get into firing even an unguided person. There's a dozen agencies who'd battle you to the last drop of your blood. And we guided persons are much more powerful."

"You don't work here any more, Evangeline. Get out!"

"SAVAGE... POWERFUL... SPLENDID... EXTRAORDINARY!"
—Los Angeles Times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"I am on a double these days. I am on the Demogorgon, and I am also on Joe- Snow. This will not mean much to an unguided and unscientific person such as yourself, but I assure you that those are the two strongest lobbies of all the wall people. And remember, Selkirk, that this is payday. Shell, man, shell!"

"Out, Evangeline, out!" Selkirk ordered, but he ordered with much less strength than usual. He was nine parts beat already, and with real pressure put on him he'd cave in.

"I'll be back within the hour, Selkirk," Evangeline said. "And I believe that a little bonus added to my pay would be a nice gesture. It's almost imperative that unguided persons make such nice gestures regularly."

Evangeline went down to the local Southside Sewage Plant wall, a fine expanse. The Turning Worm had just hit for the first time that day, and his had generated some excitement. The Turning Worm was not a prophet of multiple presence, and this was not a prime wall here, but the reproduction was good.

And the reproduction of the Joe Snow message was good, but there was still not enough contrast to make it readable. Evangeline had that snow-message imprinted on her own mind, however, and her mind had now become gray and grimy enough to give contrast. And she read:

Oh make it proud and make
it sly!
Be grassed, be snowed, be
hemp-ty,
and hold your head almighty
high
although your head be
empty.

Evangeline Gilligan walked proudly and with high head. She felt an everlasting compassion for all the unguided and unsciencéd people of the world, all those who were not prestressed, all who were not people of the walls.

The guided persons had so much working for them! And the wall washers would be coming around again in a few hours to white the walls for new messages and for another wonderful new day.

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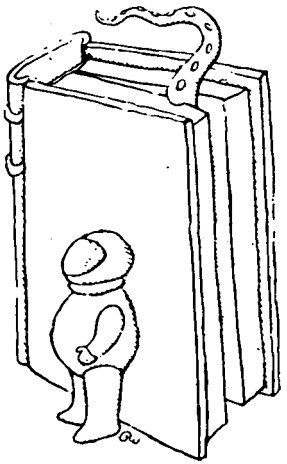
ALGIS BUDRYS

Books

The Early Pohl, by Frederik Pohl, Doubleday, $7.95

Hell's Cartographers, edited by Brian W. Aldiss and Harry Harrison, Harper, $7.95



Looking around, it's odd how we think. That's probably because, looking back, it's odd how we thought.

We're all agreed, for instance, that there was something called "modern science fiction," that it was created and promulgated by John W. Campbell, Jr., the Onlie Begettor and Sole Proprietor, and that the line of evolution goes from Gernsback to Campbell to a broadening-out in the 1950s via *F&SF* and *Galaxy*, thence perhaps through Kinglsey Amis' *New Maps of Hell* into academic respectability and the Clarion phenomenon, and then into whatever the hell structure SF has today.

Perhaps. But not enough critical work has been done on the role of the pulp magazines which jostled *Astounding* for space on the newsstands. In the place of analytical reasoning and actual research, we have a few conventionalized tags, such as:

"The pulps continuously concealed work of real merit in their back pages;"

"The raggedy-edged pulps, whose garish covers we tore off for fear of parental disapproval;"

"The thud-and-blunder lead novelettes;"

"The truss ads;"

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"Pounded out by hack writers willing to work for fractions of a cent per word, and thus trained in the school of survival to produce enormous heaps of words at high speed;" and so forth.

Essentially, these are all the same judgment. And those of us who were SF readers in those days will endorse it for you to your heart's content, easily and with a faint ennui at hearing ourselves say it all again for the thousandth time in the same verbal posture.

I have said it, Lord knows, and you know. One interesting thing about saying it is that, on examination, it turns out the attitude is not one acquired in late years with an access of discernment and elevated standards of taste. The verbal formulas are sophisticated, yes, but the attitude was always there. For all that we haunted the newsstands, connived for scarce wartime copies and bartered for missed issues, I think we all felt all along that there was something a little wrong with *Planet Stories,* and *Startling* or *Thrilling Wonder,* or *Astonishing* and *Super Science,* or the Double Action group, or the tombstone-sized *Amazing* and *Fantastic* from Chicago.

I think we felt, then and there, that the adventure lead novelette was inherently less "good" than the melancholic short story in the back pages. The crisp, declarative sentences of the former, describing action, we call "purple prose" in our letters to "The Ether Vibrates." The oblique, poetasteraceous constructs frequently found in the short fiction we thought classy writing.

We wrote to "The Ether Vibrates," "The Vizigraph," and the other letter columns, to joust with the always worldly-wise, faintly cynical editorial replies. We were trying ourselves out, seeking kinship from Wilber S. Peacock and Oscar J. Friend, who obviously knew from several years' more experience what it is to be alone in Dorothy, N.J., surrounded by people who required information on hernia, belly bloated with gas, and High John the Conqueror Root. (Were they we? No! We would *never* by they!)

It was not possible to attempt the same relationship with John W. Campbell, Jr., nuclear physicist. Yet he was essential to us in his way.

The torn covers, for instance; the Bergey valkyries, the Saunders lady wrestlers, the Anderson B-girls who fluttered into trash cans between the stationer's and the school bus...whom are we kidding? Not a one of us but could successfully smuggle and stash all sorts of things in the house. You can't tell me we were ever caught unless we helped it happen. The censorship

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was not Mom's and Dad's; it was our own, drawing on some vast, understood body of instinctive valuation in which our older kin had learned to tread water but in which we frequently submerged.

Looking back now, we say that Campbell was a conservative; in fact, a puritan whose moral dogma excluded major areas of speculation which were left for others to explore later. (Except that we aren't; diddling around in them isn't the same thing). What we fail to connect to this recent intellectual discovery is that Campbell wasn't our outstanding preceptor despite his trait; he was our only recognized preceptor because of it.

We say, in short, that we grew from the pulps to *Astounding*, and from *Astounding* into our present enlightenment. These are lies. We read the pulps and ASF simultaneously and with equal voracity they were two sides of the one coin, and our special relationship with the pulps was more intriguing, racier, and in some ways more genuine, while our relationship with *Astounding* was respectable. And our present enlightenment, which will no doubt dim in the hindsight of years to come, derives not linearly from ASF but from a complex action of the love/hate relationship between the pulps and "modern science fiction" within ourselves.

It is all defense mechanism. ASF with its literal technology adventure covers, its interior illustrations by Kramer, Orban and Williams (whom none of us wanted to draw like), its absence of pulp-group ads after it went digest-sized, its serious letter column discussions, its sociological editorials and its cryptic blurbs and lettercolumn replies, was "Good." All the others, whose artists we strove to imitate, whose least mention in the fanzine review columns replays in our minds to this day, whose prize of an original illustration for the "best" letters resides still — only ostensibly forgotten — in the same only superficially neglected carton with the 1942-1948 copies of *Planet*; all these, all this, is "Bad."

Or, rather, it is "wrong," as distinguished from ASF's straight-edged "right." None of us, then or ever, used words like "effective" or "successful" in describing our opinion of a story. These were and are secondary, narrow considerations. We care first, and at the very least as much as ever, whether a story is "right" in its style, mode, and dialectics, and if we find it so, we call it "good." In this respect we are human; timid, conservative, dogmatic...puritanical.

An interesting thing about discovering these matters now is what happens to our consideration of people who dealt with them then.

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One of our abiding beliefs, for example, was that only Campbell had the intellect to formulate a coherent view of the world; we thought of Scott Peacock, for instance, as a nice guy; Sam Merwin, Jr., bothered us because of his evident contempt for technology. Each man in turn fell victim in our eyes to his null-Campbellianism. Ray Palmer was full of two-a-penny bombast; this was more important than the fact that he achieved the highest circulations ever gathered by any science fiction magazine, and more significant than our sending our earliest literary effort to him, rather than to Campbell. We knew we weren't good enough for Campbell yet;* we knew Palmer was a bad editor; *ergo,* we sent it to Palmer.

What Campbell actually had was total, instinctive contact with the same *geist* that made publishers put blondined women on the covers for readers to tear off. It was a unique time in the long history of SF as a branch of belles-lettres. Campbell was "right." All others, though equally educated, equally endowed with all the nimble faculties of intellect, equally equipped to observe, analyze, and report, were "wrong."

It must have been a very peculiar time for Don Wollheim, Frederik Pohl, Cyril Kornbluth, Damon Knight, Ray Bradbury, and dozens of others who were either just breaking into SF professionally or, worse, had been in it for a few years and had had time to articulate to themselves the dismaying fact that they were infidels. Dismaying, and yet...all of us have some little taste for outlawry. It's not a bad feeling for a while in one's life to have walked about in the still watches of the night, weighing-up oneself among the snug estates of the slumbering burghers.

Hints, occasional outright declarations and ingenious denials all bearing on this state of mind, are to be found in *Hell's Cartographers* and *The Early Pohl,* both of which you should obtain.

The Early Pohl continues the Doubleday series which thus far has covered Asimov, del Rey, Williamson, and Frank Belknap Long in addition to the present volume, which represents a rise to an .800 batting average. Like the others, it intersperses a group of stories, mostly of historical interest, with autobiographical anecdotes of considerable present relevance.

For instance, an interesting thing about Frederik Pohl as distinct from most of his colleagues is that he established a towering reputation without getting within

**We weren't good enough for Palmer, either, it turned out.*

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stroking distance of *Astounding.* Yet he is of the same literary generation as most of ASF's brightest stars, and was at one time the literary agent who represented most of them.

He was also the literary agent who did most of the work with the early *Galaxy.* And the editor who did the most to establish SF's connections with Ballantine Books which, some of us recall poignantly, was paying $5000 advances for SF when the rest of the paperback originals market was paying $1500* for work no worse. He also started the *Star* series of original SF anthologies, which resulted in what you see about you in the paperback story today. Then he became *Galaxy's* editor, and now he is the SF editor at Bantam, where he can take direct responsibility for books like *Dhalgren.* And back before any of this happened, back in the 1940s while he was editor of *Astonishing,* he discovered Ray Brandbury when nobody else thought he was worth finding.

What we see here, then, is a major null-Campbellian career, roughly contemporaneous with Campbell's, which is still progressing and which exerted profound influences on SF all during the time that ASF's effulgence was masking them.

The extent of that masking can be measured with the profound shock which swept through the SF establishment when Kingsley Amis produced *New Maps of Hell* in the 1950s, thus opening our door on academe and simultaneously letting in the death of middleclass science fiction. You will note, if you look, that Amis chose Pohl (and Kornbluth) as the quintessential creator(s) of "good" SF. This was a totally new and nearly cataclysmic definition of "good."

There is a tendency in hindsight to homogenize it all — to put Fred and Arthur and Isaac and Ted and Bob and Ray and Harlan in the same one box and say "SF" when you point to it. But when Amis first said it about Fred as the surviving partner and Cyril in absentia, it came as a mortal shock, and cost Amis a lot of points with people not named Fred.

New Maps boiled down to an assertion that it was entirely possible to look at the shape of 1950s SF and see it systematic, clear, in motion toward a definable goal, and largely disconnected from the 1940s "modern" science fiction which most thought was still going on. This resulted in a series of attacks on Amis, some of which chipped a few corners off his thesis but which in the main proved

**These figures are twenty years old; one of them hasn't changed much, however.*

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unable to knock over the rather voluminous substance of his critical documentation. Some fury was then directed toward Pohl, who is as human as you or I, but not as personally lovable as, for instance people who refrain from sharply putting down your pet idea. What those attacks proved is that Fred goes back a long way in this field and has solid roots to go with his many branches.

SF has not been the same. (Those of you who are in your thirties and profit from it might consider a special award for Amis.) But everyone who is connected to present-day SF in any way ought to read *The Early Pohl,* first chance, for the anecdotes on how a bright young man coped with SF life and the overpowering presence of Campbell in the late 1930s.

The stories...well, the stories are interesting as examples of what Pohl thought the public wanted. Later in life, he did a lot better at making his technical principles work when he was applying them. When he was writing "Highwayman of the Void" for *Planet,* he still had a few wars to live through.

The weakest part of the "Early" series is the fiction *qua* fiction, though it is fascinating as evidence. So *Hell's Cartographers,* which is pure autobiography, is better stuff for this party.

Edited by Brian Aldiss and Harry Harrison, it contains long personal essays by each of the editors, plus Robert Silverberg, Alfred Bester, Damon Knight, and Pohl, so that you can segue directly from the Doubleday book into this one from Harper & Row with hardly a pause.

Pohl continues, and expands on the material of his life. This, in turn, meshes with the autobiography of Damon Knight, his colleague/successor at various early projects for Fictioneers, Inc., where Knight gradually transformed himself from a somewhat Bok-ish illustrator into an author and editor. And eventually into the incisive analytical mind which turned out to be the essential factor in the founding and continued success of the Milford SF Writers' Conference, as well, of course, as the *Orbit* series and the pioneering SF criticism whose standards we try to live up to.

The Knight material reinforces the story of Fred Pohl. Together and singly they put up with the practices of pulp publishers, fought the vicissitudes of pulp distribution, hid the nature of their employment and product from various persons of importance to them, and all the while had to watch *Astounding,* with its prestige and with the mighty weight of Street & Smith's sales facilities behind it, create the

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impression that the disparities of the situation were even greater than they actually were.

From there, one can move to the Alfred Bester contribution.* Having moved, one finds that Bester was totally bewildered by Campbell, and rather dismayed. Like Knight, he tells of going in to talk to the major SF editor of his day, expecting to learn something or strike some spark from the man whose reputation as a creative mind was (deservedly) overwhelming, and instead getting something incomprehensible — in Bester's case, a pitchman's patter for Dianetics.

This is not the most significant thing vis-a-vis Campbell about the Bester essay. What's more interesting in that respect is that although Bester contributed regularly if sparsely to ASF over the late '30s, he instinctively stayed away from Campbell until that fatal meeting, after which he threw himself firmly into the arms of Campbell's emerging competitors. It seems clear from the essay that Bester never thought much one way or the other about ASF's significance. It was a market, he was a pro, and when he thought he was dealing with a maniac, he went elsewhere. The fact that the competitors could pay above or with ASF's rates was also of importance to him. Furthermost, it seems highly unlikely that Campbell would ever have let Bester write *The Demolished Man,* or sweated it into life with him the way Horace Gold did. Without that, and its firestorm of success, there would have been no *The Stars My Destination,* or the brilliant series of shorter pieces in this magazine.

It was in reading *Cartographers,* and finding again and again that so many significant people did so many important things in reaction to John Campbell, that it occurred to me how major a figure he really is. We thought it was because he was a teacher, but it turns out that he accomplished almost as much simply by casting a shadow or interposing his bulk along the intended line of what would have been a rather different major career. The man is vast, and above the need for anyone to claim that he was not human, with human traits and sometimes unintended effects on others.

In the 1950s, the Robert Silverberg/Randall Garrett partnership was decried in many corners for selling Campbell ream after ream of only marginally entertaining fiction, which was foisted on him not on its own merits but by dovetailing it with talking points scored in prior office discussions.

**This isn't the order in which the pieces appear. But I'd like you to skip around in accordance with my suggestions, because it makes my thesis work out better.*

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In that decade, Campbell had a weakness for setting down young writers in his office and having intellectual wrestling matches with them. In fact, most of these were disguised lectures on whatever new discovery Campbell's mind had made that month. Campbell was showing a strong predilection for gimmick thinking — if it couldn't be put as a slogan or a conundrum, he'd rather not deal with it — and he'd toss it at you in a convenient verbal packet. You were supposed to grapple with it, pound it or amalgamate it into something slightly new, and toss it back, whereupon, *zip*, here it came again, mutated a little farther.

One young ASF writer of my personal acquaintance sat there and said "Uh-huh," a lot, storing it all, and then going off and grinchling at his typewriter until it was all straightened out in his head.* But Garrett had another technique. Garrett, as verbally thrustful as anyone you'd care to have date your daughter, would take Campbell's ideas and pun the words in which they were packeted, thus producing a pseudo-idea.†

Silverberg, very weary these days of how his role in SF has worked out, probably not pleased to have his youth pawed over once again, nevertheless clearly learned something from watching Campbell fall prey to the Garrett charm. He may also have decided that for storytelling purposes it suffices to tell the readers you have told them a story. Certainly it worked on Campbell, and although this episode in his career is given short shrift in *Cartogrphers,* it wants to be borne in mind when reading Silverberg's essay. And one thing is clear. Unlike almost all other young SF writers who came to ASF's door in the 50s and earliest 60s, Silverberg saw it not as a destination but as a way station — a place one or two steps above *Satellite Science Fiction* or *Dynamic,* pricewise and prestigewise, but nothing all that special anymore.

The 1940s were over; over.

Harry Harrison tumbled into this discovery with a glad cry. Another illustrator gone to hell, he was by training, breeding and instinct on *Astonishing*'s and *Marvel*'s side of the fence as solid as a rock. Vigorously proletarian, determinedly anti-bourgeois, loudly Esperantist, at first handling his prose as if preparing it to be

Watching me try to think on my feet, sober, is like watching a man trying to stuff a rolling pin into a pencil sharpener.

†*Vide "Sound Decision," et al, by various people named Darrel T. Langart. You want to know if SF is predictive? A principal character of "Rebellion," by John W. Campbell, Jr., is named Garnalt.*

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lettered in balloons, he turned out to be one of Campbell's major attention-getters, starting with *Deathworld,* and going on from there. Combining the best features of Poul Anderson, Eric Frank Russell, H. Beam Piper and Moliere, Harrison — with the complementary exception of Frank Herbert — stands as Campbell's last great editorial discovery. And while Herbert is the intellectual child of Robert Heinlein, and hence in on the most impressive credentials of all, Harrison had to brawl and pummel his way into the cathedral. He was a Goth in the last days of the empire, as surely as Herbert was a Greek. Like a Goth, he has kept the traditions he found, and stands today as Campbell's articulate, deservedly good spokesman. But he was never a Roman.

Brian Aldiss, I would say, deliberately chose not to be any of those things. Of all the biographies in this book, his is the most tantalizing because he shares the intellectual community which, in the 1950s, articulated its view of SF through Amis and would soon produce *New Worlds.* In the USA, it was impossible to come to flower in the 1950s and not deal with ASF. At transatlantic distances, it was apparently easier to perceive that the past might not be quite as agreed-on, and that the future certainly lay elsewhere. So Aldiss became a major figure, like Bradbury and Pohl, Bester and Knight, and the older Silverberg, without *Astounding* or *Analog,* which he has steadfastly ignored. This of course is quite different from the experience of his great friend, Harrison, and so perhaps there are buried constraints on Aldiss's willingness to deal explicitly with that topic.

But he deals with many others. I'm sure that he, like all the authors in *Hell's Cartographers,* did not have it in mind to produce the books I have just finished describing. I'm sure they had two other books in mind, just as I'm sure Lester del Rey had something else in mind by editing *The Best of John W. Campbell.* But I think what I read there is in there, and think you could do worse than to enjoy these worthy works from that standpoint.

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Gregory Benford and Gordon Eklund wrote "The Anvil of Jove," July 1976. A character from that story, Bradley Reynolds, figures in this new and suspenseful tale about an expedition to search for life on Mars.

Hellas Is Florida

by GORDON EKLUND and GREGORY BENFORD

I

It was a fact, Major Paul Smith reasoned affirmatively, as he gazed at the cratered terrain now sweeping past, that life existed on the planet Mars.

No, not just the present landing party — Kastor, McIntyre, Reynolds, and Morgan — who were surveying the northern reaches of the basin of Hellas, but native Martian life. Up to and most definitely including a number of related varieties of complex spores. The proof was there. For two decades, a succession of robot probes, both American and Russian in origin, had relayed the evidence to a supposedly stunned Earth populace.

It resembled the assassination of a famed political or religious leader: a person never forgot his own first experience. For Smith, the moment chanced upon his final year at the academy. A physics course. the instructor, a former NASA technician, halted the class in midsession, while he scurried to huddle with three beaming colleagues. "Gentlemen, gentlemen," announced the instructor, spinning free to face the class. (His hands actually shook; Smith envisioned them trembling now.) "I have just been informed that apparent evidence has been received at Pasadena which tends to indicate the possible presence of life on Mars."

Fear. He recollected the sweep of emotion like a bitter taste on his tongue. Fear crawled up his spine, held taut and secure in the stiff-backed chair. *We are not alone. Green men. Flying saucers. Slitherly lizzardly fiends. Are they watching us?* Smith grinned now (in embarrassment?), remembering the automatic assault of old cliches. In spite of the instructor's carefully placed qualifiers, his soul had quivered fearfully.

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The evening headline, with no place for *apparents, tends,* or *possibles,* had screamed bluntly:

LIFE ON MARS!

And, even though Smith by then knew that "life" as yet indicated nothing more frightening than the presence of organic matter in the Martian soil, the icy fingers clutched.

Life on Mars. For the hell of it, Smith uttered the phrase aloud into the tomblike silence of the orbiting command chamber. "Life on Mars." Three such simple little words. Substitute most any other word for that final noun and the result ranged between banality and silliness.

"Life on Mars," Paul Smith said. A big crater, the circling slopes standing like the spiny ridges on a horntoad's back, drifted past the window. Sure, there was life down there, but the old fear had long ago been eroded. Even the continuing reports from the landing party in Hellas of new and remarkable strains of life failed to stir Smith much. The human mind, he realized, possessed an awe-inspiring talent for converting in remarkable time the most fantastic truths into the most banal facts.

Speaking of time, he guessed he ought to prepare. Smith hung curled in the command chamber nook nearest the window that presently overlooked the passing Martian surface. This vehicle, the *Tempest,* orbited at a mean distance of some two hundred kilometers above Mars. Each successive orbit occupied slightly more than one hour. Except in cases of dire emergency, the landing party below (Nixon Base, Colonel Kastor had named them, supposedly in honor of the man who had served as President during the first manned Lunar expeditions, but more likely as a stroking device aimed at soothing the present administration) transmitted every fourth pass. This, as Smith well knew, was number four.

The transmissions, dull and impersonal as Kastor normally made them, served to snap the monotony, but they also forced Smith to move. God, he hated Mars. An incredible truth, not yet banal. Paul Smith, who had given up five years of his life and journeyed through some sixty million kilometers of space only to discover that he passionately loathed the objective of all these efforts. Mars seemed to mock his own world. The mountains climbed higher — he passed the dome of Olympus Mons each orbit and now refused even to glance that way — the canyons plowed deeper, the plains swept wider. And the life — life on Mars! — mocking life. Life that may have once been spawned amid relative beauty

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(some scientists theorized) but which now certainly existed in infernal ugliness. That's why he hated the damn planet — it was ugly. Through no lack of his own imagination, either — ugly, ugly, ugly! Smith remembered the view of Earth seen from space, a sight familiar to him (but never monotonous) after nearly a full year of preparatory experiments and maneuvers in the orbital lab. The Earth shook the breath right out of your chest. Green and azure blue, brown and puffy white. Not this — not red. He studied the cratered terrain. This was part of the Southern Hemisphere, and the North, more volcanically active, was less tedious. Still, he sometimes guessed that Kastor understood his real attitude, which helped explain why, in an unanticipated, unexplained change of plans, Kastor had elected to take young Reynolds down to the surface instead of the more experienced Smith, who had not disputed the decision at the time. Kastor insisted it was because they needed experience in orbit, when there was already plenty of that below in Morgan and McIntyre. Smith said nothing. Kastor pointed out that Reynolds, as astronomer, already knew more about Martian lifeforms than Smith, a military officer. Smith didn't argue. Much later, while the others slept, Smith asked young Reynolds if he'd ever read *A Princess of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs. When Reynolds looked blank, Smith laughed and said, "Then I guess you don't know so damn much about Martian life as Kastor thinks."

Paul Smith forced himself to move. Releasing the straps that bound him, he floated gently up, then kicked out. He drifted across the length of the command chamber, struck a wall softly, then slipped straight on the ricochet into the chair fronting the radio. He checked his altitude and confirmed his location in terms of the Martian surface. Hellas itself would not come into view for another ten minutes. He decided to call now. He spoke softly, but his voice boomed. "Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.* Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.* Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.*"

Silence. Apparently Kastor wasn't quite so eager.

A sudden, angry impatience gripped him. Smith wanted this finished so he could go back to his window. Even in the time so far, he had grown inordinately fond of isolation. During the second week, he had discovered the fragile, spiderlike webs woven by the taut blue veins on the backs of his hands. "Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.*

Kastor stirred. "Hello, *Tempest,* this is Nixon Base. Paul, is that you?"

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No, sir, it's Edgar Rice goddamn Burroughs. "Yes, Jack."

"How about it? Anything especially interesting up there?"

"Nope. Quiet as a little mouse." Smith tried to envision them down there. The plain of Hellas flat as a child's chest. The red dust heaped and piled. The howling, oddly forceless wind. The horizon near enough to be touched. Four figures in matching bulky suits. The mantislike crawlers. Kastor controlled the radio. Once he had permitted McIntyre to speak, but the subject had been a geological matter. After Smith received the party's transmissions, he relayed them to Houston, where the highlights were played — against old images of Mars — on the evening news shows. "There's a light storm brewing at one hundred twenty degrees longitude, thirty degrees latitude south, but that shouldn't affect you."

"It doesn't seem likely — half a planet away."

"I guess not." *You bastard, I'm only trying to do my job up here:* to scan the Martian surface for dust-storms. So far — more mockery — Mars had remained uncharacteristically quiescent. The annual Great Dust Storm was not due to hit till well after their departure, a cautiously predetermined fact: the storm originated in the Noachis region near the edge of Hellas. Still, there was usually some lesser activity.

"We've made some atmospheric samplings and I want to transmit the preliminary results," Kastor said.

"Sure, go ahead."

While Kastor spoke (repeating no doubt word-for-word only what Morgan had told him), Smith listened with no more than half an ear. He remained vaguely curious, but not obsessed. Spores. Organic compounds. Microbiotic life. He'd heard this all before. Why not, he wondered idly, a silicon giraffe? How about a two-hundred foot, green-skinned, horn-rimmed Martian worm, with a funny nose?

And he missed Lorna. Horny for his own wife. How little the average citizen knew of an astronaut's agony. With Morgan in the crew, maybe they got the wrong idea. Prolonged nightly orgies. A pornography of the spaceways. They didn't know Loretta Morgan. He grinned at the thought of the old bag stricken with mad lust.

Kastor screamed: "Oh, my God, hold on! Jesus, we're shaking like—!"

Silence.

Paul Smith felt icy fingers of fear creeping along his spine. "Jack!" He spoke softly this time. "Nixon Base!"

And in this emergent moment of crisis his eyes unfilmed, the

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padding illusions of the mind fell away and Paul Smith saw suddenly that this world had now turned on them in some unimaginable way. And that they were unprepared. So many months of stress, boredom — each of them was now tipped at some angle to reality, had made his own private pact with the world and...been twisted by it. He, Smith, was now clutched in his Mars-hating neurosis. Below, each member of the ground team was no longer the well-balanced crewman that he'd been Earthside. No, the one thing they'd never been able to check — the effects of isolation and work in new, deep space — had slowly worked some new change in each of them, gnawing away at their personal defenses. And now they were exposed....

Smith grimaced. He needed the others to navigate the return module to Earth. Alone, he would die. Starve or strangle or suck vacuum above the bloated crusted carcass of red, blotchy Marscape, the leering land crushing him to it.... "Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.* Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.*"

Smith had to tilt his head to see the ten-inch video screen set at an angle in the hull to his left. The flat pink basin of Hellas crept into view past jagged, towering mountaintops. There was life down there on Mars.

II

Colonel Samuel J. Kastor squirmed in the aluminum frame of his crawler seat and struggled to be content with the worm's-crawl pace Loretta Morgan maintained as she drove across the basin. After all, he reasoned, there was no reason to hurry. Smith wouldn't fly away, the landing module lay safely secured, and the orbits of Earth and Mars remained steady. Hell, he thought, we've already uncovered more firm data in a few weeks down here than fifteen robot flights over a twenty-year period. That twenty billion dollar cost figure for the entire expedition irritated him. Kastor didn't want to have to pay it back out of his own sixty-five thousand dollar salary. We're giving them more than they have any right to ask for, he decided.

Hellas, which from above resembled an elongated pancake, stretched its features around the two crawlers. He saw rocky ridges, smooth bumps, a few boulders, but mostly dust. The wind was a constant factor, but buried inside the hulk of a suit, that was easily discarded. Kastor regretted the necessity of landing here. McIntyre, the geologist, had fought hard against the decision. His reasons were professional; Kastor's were artistic. McIntyre had loudly asserted that it was ridiculous to send a manned expedition to Mars and

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ignore the volcanic constructs and plains; he favored a landing site somewhere on the volcanic plain between Tharsis Ridge and Olympus Mons. NASA rejected the suggestion. Lifeforms, not rocks, had motivated the twenty billion dollar investment, and lifeforms happened to be most plentiful in the southern Hellas region. All Kastor had desired were the best, most dramatic videotapes possible. The sight of a volcano twenty-five kilometers high or a canyon seventy-five kilometers wide could have pried open a lot of weary eyes back on Earth. Still, Kastor damn well realized, if the expedition succeeded in solving some of the puzzles of Martian life, then the wildest pictures under creation would mean nothing beside that accomplishment. Maybe that was why he was in such a hurry now. Surrounded by these bleak wastes, he knew it was life or nothing. He had expended five years of his own life on a cosmic gamble. Would it pay off?

McIntyre was driving the second crawler, with Bradley Reynolds strapped to the seat beside him. The two vehicles rode nearly side-by-side. Reynolds, his frail form concealed by the heavy suit, waved an arm high in the air. Understanding the signal, Kastor glanced at his chronometer and then, involuntarily, at the clear, powder-blue sky. No, Smith wasn't up there yet. At dawn and dusk the *Tempest* would streak through the sky, a bright yellow star on a frantic course. Except for Morgan, none of them bothered to look any more.

Reaching lightly across, Kastor waved a hand in front of Morgan's bubble helmet. When she glanced his way, he pointed toward the ground. By common consent, the four of them avoided radio contact whenever possible. Kastor wasn't sure he understood why. Perhaps the reason had to do with their constant mutual proximity these last years. In other words, they were sick to their stomachs with one another.

As soon as Morgan brought the crawler to a smooth halt, Kastor bounded off the side into the piled dust. When the other crawler stopped, he motioned Reynolds to join him. He waited until the other man had approached near enough so that his narrow, angular, bearded face showed distinctly through his helmet, then said, "Brad, would you mind going over with me the data you collected from the last atmospheric sampling?"

"No, sir, not at all." Reynolds began to repeat what he had already told Kastor an hour before. Kastor listened intently, refreshing his own memory. Over the radio he heard Morgan's sour sigh. Screw her. Sure, it would have been easier

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to permit Reynolds to do his own talking, but Kastor knew full well the value of public exposure. This was his expedition — he was the commander. He didn't intend to allow some bright kid to sneak up and erode that bitterly achieved position.

"Then there's been another quantitative increase?" Kastor said.

Reynolds said, "Yes, sir, that's true."

"Which fits with your previous findings?"

"Perfectly. Would you like to see?"

Kastor said, "Yes, show me."

Reynolds trudged back to his crawler and returned shortly with a crude map he and Morgan had drawn of Hellas basin. Various scribblings — lines, circles, dots, and figures — littered the face of the chart. Kastor began to shake his head inside his helmet, but then realized the danger in letting Reynolds guess his confusions. "Where's the focus again?"

Reynolds laid a thick finger on the northeastern corner of the map. "Everything seems to be pointing this way, sir."

"The closer we approach, the greater the quantity of life."

"And the variety and complexity, too."

"I remember that."

"But you still don't think we should tell Houston."

"We've given them all the data."

"But not our own conclusions."

Kastor sighed inwardly. Morgan also hounded him constantly on this. "We don't want to look like fools, Brad. We have no explanations for this."

"Maybe, if we told them, they could find one." This argument was also Morgan's favorite.

"There's plenty of time for that later."

"But, sir, don't you—?"

Kastor backed off. "I've got to talk to Smith. We can discuss this later."

"But, sir—"

"Later, Reynolds," Kastor said rudely. The communication equipment occupied an aluminum crate in the back of his crawler. Kastor believed he had made a wise choice, selecting Reynolds over Smith for the landing party. Reynolds was damn bright — even Morgan had failed to detect the peculiar patterning of Martian life. Brightness wasn't the reason Kastor had chosen Reynolds. Kastor prided himself on his own ability to see past people's surface maneuverings to their core motivations. For himself, he wanted one thing from life, and that was power. Kastor believed that ninety-five percent of the human race acted for similar aims, but most, ashamed, concealed this

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fact behind meaningless phrases like "the good of humanity," "the future of the planet," and "the joy in helping others." Kastor didn't give a hoot about humanity, the planet, or any others. Unlike most people, he didn't try to hide his feelings from himself. Twenty-five years ago, he had sought an Air Force commission because he had believed that was where the power lay. A mistake. War, once the primary pursuit of mankind, had dwindled to a vestigial state. He now knew fame was the answer, and that was why he was here. Bradley Reynolds — there was a weird one. Kastor believed Reynolds was part of the five percent — power failed to interest him. But what did? Paul Smith — though, young, ambitious — an obvious rival. But Reynolds was unreadable.

Kastor hauled the communication gear out of the crawler and set up the radio on the Martian sand. Morgan and Reynolds crowded around him, while McIntyre remained seated in his crawler.

Kastor twisted the antenna and twirled a dial. He suddenly heard a hollow disembodied voice: "—this is *Tempest.* Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.*"

Adjusting his suit radio so that his voice would transmit above, Kastor spoke evenly: "Hello, *Tempest,* this is Nixon Base. Paul, is that you?"

"Yes, Jack."

"How about it? Anything especially interesting up there?"

"Nope. Quiet as a little mouse. There's a light storm brewing at one hundred twenty degrees longitude, thirty degrees latitude south, but that shouldn't affect you."

Kastor spied the opportunity for a lightly sarcastic jeer. "It doesn't seem likely — half a planet away."

"I guess not."

Kastor grinned. Poor Smith, getting bored up there. It took a damn strong man to withstand total isolation; you had to be able to bear your own company. Kastor said, "We've made some atmospheric samplings and I want to transmit the preliminary results."

"Sure, go ahead," said Smith.

Kastor spoke slowly, repeating as nearly word-for-word as his memory allowed what Reynolds had told him. He tried to envision Smith up there listening, but it was the bigger audience that interested him. The people of the planet Earth. The late evening news. He tried to add some drama to his voice, but the dry words refused to be manipulated. This was heavy stuff, he knew. It was life. The Martian Garden of Eden. Reduced to facts, the truth sounded not only dull but obvious.

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The quake struck without warning, as suddenly as a bolt of pitchfork lightning. The ground trembled and Kastor tottered. He fell flat on his rump and got tossed into the air. Reaching out to grab a secure hold, he realized the whole world was insecure. He screamed, "Oh, my God, hold on! Jesus, we're shaking like—!"

He saw Morgan fall. Reynolds sprawled on top of her. The radio bounced like an energized ball. Kastor threw out his arms and covered it. He hugged the radio. If the world collapsed around him, he wouldn't be alone.

A barrage of voices pounded his ears. Reynolds shouted. Morgan cried. McIntyre screamed. "It's a goddamn quake!" yelled Kastor. "Shut up and hold on." Incredibly, he saw one of the crawlers flop on its back. A burst of dust and sand covered his helmet. He was blinded, buried. He clawed for the sky and realized he still had hold of the radio.

Silence.

The land had stopped shaking.

Kastor shoved away the blanket of debris covering him and stood up. Tentatively he tested his limbs. Crouching, he unburied the radio. "Men," he said softly, adjusting his suit to receive.

A woman's voice answered, "Jack."

"Morgan, where are you?"

"Here, behind you."

"Oh." He realized he could see. Turning, he saw Morgan crouched upon the sand. A body — Reynolds — lay sprawled beneath her heavy arms. Deserting the radio, Kastor hurried over. "He's dead."

"I don't think so," said Morgan. "He may have banged his head on his own helmet. Turn up your radio. I think I can hear his breath."

Kastor didn't care about that. His gaze caught hold of the upturned crawler. Much of their gear — food, testing equipment, bundles of paper — covered the ground. A trickle of water from a ruptured vat seeped into the Martian soil. The second crawler remained upright and undamaged.

Morgan's voice spoke into his radio. "Brad, can you stand?"

Reynolds (weakly): "Yeah, but I'm bleeding."

Kastor saw McIntyre and groaned. The poor bastard had been sitting in the crawler. When it turned over, he had flipped out. A sharp heavy strut had cracked his helmet. Kastor looked down at the mangled skull and felt ill. "Jesus Christ," he cried, "he's dead."

III

Loretta Morgan believed they had underestimated the terrible hostility of this planet. Left undisturbed for eons since creation,

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Mars lay passive. We're like fleas crawling through the fur of a dog, she thought. And Mars will scratch us off.

She remembered how they'd buried poor McIntyre — the body tightly sealed like their own garbage to avoid any possibility of contamination. Kastor had called her a cold bitch because of her refusal to mourn. Well, to her life was a gift and crying because it was gone was like a spoiled brat whining because Santa had brought only four presents. We've no right to expect a damn thing from this universe, she thought, and that includes life itself. When she died, anyone who mourned would be later visited by a giggling ghost. (Her own.)

She was damned if she'd shed a single tear for Colonel Kastor, either.

The hard, tight surfaces of a life-support tent encircled her and Reynolds. It was cold Martian night out there, but she'd already completed her evening walk. After sunset, as soon as the cocoonlike webbing of the tent stood upon the sand, she went strolling alone. Kastor had called her walks a sign of feminine sentimentality. She stood poised upon the tip of a dune and peered through her bubble helmet at the steady green orb of the shining Earth glimpsed clearly through the thin Martian atmosphere. For five minutes, she looked away only to blink. Humankind invaded space, she believed, so we could learn once and for all how damn inconsequential we were. That's what that green star told her. So did this: life on Mars. So did McIntyre and Kastor, dead and unmourned seventy million kilometers from what each called home. Who (or what) gave one damn for any of them, dead or alive or indifferent?

She sat naked beside Reynolds. Kastor's death had freed her at night of her own clothes. Not that he would ever have noticed. Sex, Kastor must have believed, was a sign of feminine sentimentality. She would have noticed, though.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Reynolds, who was trying hard to act as though he'd seen a naked woman before. In fact, she believed that he had. Despite the boyish smiles and mere twenty-seven years, Bradley Reynolds was a man whose natural impulses sprang too suddenly to the surface for him ever to know true naivete; Reynolds might occasionally be artless, but he was never simple.

Letting her heavy breasts fall naturally, she leaned over and touched the map with a finger. "I think we're getting damn closer. The source ought to be here."

"The Garden of Eden," he said, peering at the heavily notated

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northeastern corner of the map.

She drew back. "Don't call it that. That was Kastor's need for dramatics. Life on Mars is drama enough. We don't need PR slogans."

"Maybe we don't, but NASA may." There he was again. Artless, but not simple.

"Then call it what you like."

"How about Agnew Point?"

"Who?"

"The base. Agnew was Nixon's vice-president. He got chased from office for taking a bribe."

"Why? You're not interested in a Senate seat, too, are you?"

His lips formed a boyish smile. "I'm not old enough." Reynolds sat with the radio between his tightly clothed legs. Smith would soon pass. "How long do you estimate it will take for us to reach this source?"

"With only the one crawler and three quarters of our supplies either consumed or lost, I'd guess three weeks."

"We may go hungry on the way back."

"So?"

He shrugged. "The only solution I can devise that explains the source is that Martian life has evolved so recently that it's still centered on one point." He grinned. "Like a Garden of Eden."

She made a sour face. "It's evolved too far for that to be true."

"But how do we know? Without an ozone layer, in a carbon dioxide atmosphere, the rate of mutation may be fantastic."

"Not necessarily. The first probes found evidences of life as far from Hellas as Elysium. Maybe the apparent centralization is merely a matter of environmental convenience. On Earth, there's more life in Florida than Greenland. It's easier to stay alive in Florida. Hellas might be the Florida of Mars." She studied the chronometer strapped to his wrist. "But you better get ready. Try to raise him."

"Smith?" He acted surprised.

"You are going to tell them aren't you?" she said impatiently.

"Take advantage of the fact that Kastor drove his crawler into a twenty-meter chasm? Why should I?"

"You told me you agreed: they could help."

"I don't think so. We're here — they're not."

"But why keep it a secret now? You're not after Kastor's dramatics."

"I'll tell them later. This soon it would make Kastor look like a fool."

She could conceal her irritation no longer. "But he's *dead,* damn it."

Reynolds looked solemn. "All the more reason to protect his reputation."

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"But he was a horse's ass."

"I'm sorry, Morgan."

She was realizing how awfully alone this made her. Wasn't there anyone else — man or woman or beast — who truly understood exactly how minute a human being was? This was *Mars,* damn it; native life existed here. Who could worry about the reputation of a dead man?

Smith's high, taut voice came over the radio: "—this is *Tempest.* Nixon Base, this is *Tempest.*"

Reynolds said, "Tempest, this is Hellas Base. Paul, I've got some bad news. Colonel Kastor died today."

"Oh, no," said Smith.

You damn hypocrites, thought Morgan.

IV

Bradley Reynolds held his arms around Loretta Morgan as she lay stiffly beside him. Outside the life-support unit, the winds raged, tossing dust and sand in great, huge puffs that obscured the light of day. Reynolds knew that the annual Great Martian Dust Storm normally originated in the northeastern Noachis region where it bordered upon the Hellas basin. That storm, though slow to develop, eventually expanded to the point where it circled the Martian globe. Occasionally, the storm reached clear into the northern hemisphere and covered the entire planetary surface. According to Smith, this particular storm had similarly originated in Noachis as a white cloud perhaps two hundred kilometers in length. The storm was much larger than that now, but it still wasn't the Great Storm. That wasn't due until spring. Morgan said she thought this storm was just Mars scratching for fleas. Her odd wit aside, the storm had kept them pinned down in the tent unable to move for two weeks now. Smith reported that the storm seemed to be dwindling. By crawler, the source point of Martian life (if such a point even existed, Reynolds reminded himself) remained a full week distant.

"I love you," Reynolds told Morgan, but both knew that was not true.

They lay in darkness. An equalizer. Not only were all men and all women no different in the dark, all worlds seemed the same. Except for the howling, raging wind, the noise far in excess of the actual force, this could have been the Earth. A camp high in the Sierras. A man and woman in love. Not extraordinary. "Bradley, let me go. I have to pee."

But this was Mars.

"Sure," Reynolds said, removing his arms.

He couldn't hear her moving across the tent. The wind obscured that, too. Life was precious here,

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and precarious, too easily ended. McIntyre and Kastor, Morgan's tiny pattering feet. *I am alive,* Reynolds reminded himself. *So are they.* He meant the Martians. The others refused to use such terminology, but the Martians (spores, microbes, bacteria) were alive. Reynolds felt his relative youth caused the difference. By the time he became aware of a physical universe extending beyond the barriers of his own home, the fact of life on Mars had been known. Alien life was thus an integral factor in the fabric of his consciousness — a given quantity. Even Morgan sometimes revealed a careless fear and bitter anger that life, which had seemed one of the few remaining characteristics separating man from the universe, was no longer unique to Earth. Morgan would deny this. She would say that most intelligent people (and many who were not) had accepted for decades the knowledge that life could not be limited to one world. Reynolds knew that theory and fact were never the same. The majority of Earth's population believed that a god existed, but if one appeared tomorrow in the flesh, this belief would in no way lessen the shock of the physical fact. It was the same with alien, Martian life.

But Reynolds, born in a land where God was known, not only accepted but actually expected alien life. These puzzling Martian spores, existing and thriving where they should not, could only be a beginning. There were worlds beyond — Jupiter, Saturn, Titan — and then the stars. When he talked this way, Morgan accused him of idealism, but life was no longer an ideal; life was real.

He pushed aside the blankets that covered him and stood up. He called, "Loretta?" screaming to be heard above the wind. She didn't answer. He was cold. Even in the ultimate privacy of the life-support tent, his own nudity distrubed him. He padded forward and banged his knee against a water vat.

"Ouch!"

He searched the floor for a torchlight. "Loretta? Hey, where are you?" A sudden anxious chill touched his heart. She must be eating. His fingers closed around the slick handle of the torch. He flicked a finger, ignited the beam, swung the light.

He saw nothing against the far wall.

She couldn't have gone out.

Reynolds turned the light. He recalled how Morgan before the storm had gone out alone every night ritualistically to gaze at the green beacon of the Earth, but both remaining suits and their helmets lay neatly packed in crates on the floor of the tent.

Reynolds completed a full three hundred sixty degree turn. "Lor-

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etta!" he screamed, continuing to spin.

She was nowhere present in the tent.

As he struggled into the suit — realizing too late that it was her suit and contained the rank residue of her scent — he remembered how she had been: forty years old but still lovely. Her body — squat and too stout, tiny stubby fingers and small delicate feet, wide hips, lines of three children on her belly, loose breasts.

He carefully fitted the bubble helmet over his head.

Sealing the inner airlock door, he waited impatiently for the outer door to cycle open. The shrieking wind would cover the sound of its closing; she could have left unheard.

Inside the suit he could not hear the terrible wind. Dust and sand scoured the face of his helmet. He used his hands as claws to see. Her body lay half-buried no more than a meter from the airlock. Lifting her dead weight easily in his arms, he hurried back inside.

Reynolds hoped that the brief exposure of the body to the open Martian atmosphere had not been sufficient to contaminate the land.

Before leaving the area, he would have to run a careful check to be sure.

Before he thought of any of this, though, he mourned the death of a woman he had loved.

V

The last man on Mars, Bradley Reynolds, cautiously steered the battered crawler across the dunes of northeastern Hellas. He carried with him only sufficient equipment for one man: the radio; a shovel; two picks; concentrated food, primarily cereals; five water vats; emergency oxygen; a portable life-support bag; and, most importantly, the atmospheric and soil detection devices. Everything else — including his samples and records — remained behind in the big tent. On his way back, he would stop and retrieve what he needed.

The dust storm had greatly altered the shape and texture of the land. Piles of loose dust and sand lay scattered in great peaks, waves, and swirls. In some places, slabs of hard rock stood exposed to view. The sun directly above shifted subtly in color from powder blue to sable. The horizon loomed so close he thought of touching it. The source — the focus — the Garden — lay nearby. As often as every hour, Reynolds stopped the crawler and collected new samples. He uncovered many new and complex strains of microbiotic life. When he went on, he left the samples behind. There were too many to carry. It was the source of life, not merely life itself, that interested him.

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With Morgan dead, Reynolds had not hesitated telling Earth of his own theories. The manned space program had been allowed to atrophy for nearly three decades. Only the presence of life on Mars had sparked this revival. For that reason — because Reynolds believed in the necessity of man in space—he knew he must find something now. A failure — and three deaths would not like be viewed otherwise — and the program might again shrink. Even Mars, he believed, was no more than a wart on the elephant's snout. The physical universe did exist; humankind had a right to see it.

But Smith, after relaying the data concerning the source, returned in less than a day with a reply. "Mission Control said to tell you this idea about a source for Martian life is nonsense."

Reynolds bristled. The storm groaned outside. "But I gave them the findings. They can't dispute that."

"They said coincidence."

"That's absurd. Coincidence can't—"

Even over the radio, Smith's voice rose shrilly. "I'm telling you what they said."

Reynolds remained calm. "Then they're serious?"

"Totally," said Smith solemnly, "And they want you back here. Three dead out of four is terrible. I can't pilot the *Tempest* to Earth alone. They want you to return at once to the module."

"No," Reynolds said, after a pause. "We came here for a purpose. To study life. Three deaths can't alter that."

"It's an order, Reynolds."

He decided not to disguise his suspicions any longer. "Whose?"

"What?" said Smith.

"I'm asking if you even told them. About the source. Did you keep quiet to get me back?"

Smith appeared to be laughing. "Why would I do something that stupid, Brad?"

"Because you're scared."

"I am not. I like being alone. Isolation is — it's just different."

"Don't lie to me, Paul."

"For Christ's sake, I'm not. It was an order. Houston gave an order."

Reynolds decided that Smith's story had to be treated like God; he would neither believe nor disbelieve. He did disobey. When the storm passed, he went out. The deaths of McIntyre, Kastor, and Morgan would have to provide more meaning, not less, to the search for Martian life. If a source existed out there, Reynolds would find it.

Every fourth pass of the *Tempest,* he spoke with Smith, if only to keep the other man sane. Smith was right: isolation was merely a

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different, not worse, way of living; Reynolds knew he could bear it. Smith said, "Reynolds, what you're doing is crazy. The others are dead. All of them. Do you want to die, too?"

Reynolds said, "McIntyre died because of a freak of fate, Kastor because he was careless, and Morgan because...well, because I think she wanted to. I'm searching for life. I won't die."

"But you've found it. Life is there. We know that."

"But we don't know why."

"Who cares?" Smith cried.

"I guess I do," Reynolds said softly.

VI

The butt of the tiny probe rose out of the sand, a dull gleam that caught his eye and burned his soul.

Renolds did not have to take a sample to know. Using his hands like the paws of an animals, he uncovered the probe. It was shaped like a crazy wheel on a pole, all struts and nuts and bolts. The message inscribed on one wing, though warped and weathered by the erosion of wind and sand, could be read. There was even a date.

Reynolds read, 1966.

The message itself was written in Russian.

Here lay the source of Martian life. The Garden of Eden shined in the dust.

Tottering on his haunches, Reynolds stared at the distant sky, flecked by a single wispy strand of cloud. My God, why didn't they tell us? It was a product of the secrecy of that distant age — the Cold War. And now: contamination. A Russian probe, reeking with Earth bacteria, placed down here in the basin of Hellas.

Reynolds lowered his gaze and peered at the landscape cloistered around him. Life on Mars — yes — but whose? Ours — brought with this probe — or theirs?

He knew this question was one that would never be answered.

His sorrow turned immediately to bitterness and then rage. He leaped to his feet and began kicking at the probe. His boots clanged against it. The Cyrillic script dented. The paint chipped off and the thin metal split.

Reynolds made himself relax. He sat down heavily in the powdery dust. He blinked back tears. So much, so goddamned much, and now this insane, comic, fool's finish.

Smith would arc overhead any moment. He would have to be told.

Reynolds rummaged through the facts. Was *all* the Martian life a contaminant? Or only part? If merely a part, how to explain the Garden of Eden effect?

If, if....

Suppose the probe had added a

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new element to the genetic menu of Mars. New biological information, new survival mechanisms. Something basic, like sexual reproduction itself, on the cellular level. Like adding rabbits to Australia, only symbiotic: the children of the breeding survived better than either the natives *or* the contaminants. A new breed of Martians, spreading out from the Garden of Eden. Injection of a new trick into the genetic heritage would or *could* cause such a runaway effect.

Two hypotheses: (a) all Martians were contaminants; (b) this was merely a new breed.

Which was right?

There was no way to tell. None.

Until the next expedition, which could make a careful study of the Garden and its blossoming life.

But this wasn't a simple scientific issue.

Once they heard about this absurd Soviet gadget, they'd leap to the same immediate assumption that he had: hypothesis (b). Only on Earth they wouldn't be able to kick and claw at the probe. They would strike out at whatever seemed handy. And the space program was temptingly handy.

Given two hypotheses, each equally likely in the face of the first facts...which do you choose?

The one which leads to more research, a second manned expedition?

Or the idea that closes off discussion? That slits the throat of the enquiry itself?

Reynolds sat in the powder and thought. Silence enclosed him.

Then he went to the battered crawler, fetched the radio, and set it up on the sand.

"*Tempest,*" he said, "this is Morgan Base."

"Roger. Reading you."

"Nothing special to report. Nice landscapes, rusty sand. Microbes everywhere. It's just a good place to live, I guess. Back on Earth, you can tell them...tell them Hellas is Florida."

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Mr. Boles ("The Sunday We Didn't Go to Lemon's," May 1976) returns with an oddly affecting story about the day America woke up to find its feet replaced by . . .

The Wheels of God

by PAUL DARCY BOLES

One morning, America's feet were gone. It happened overnight, swiftly and suddenly, just like that. Men, women, children, and the newest babies awakened to find that their pedal extremities — as the 20th Century's Fats Waller referred to them in his splendid recording of "Your Feet's Too Big" — were absent. Completely footless were they. Those interesting affairs we once stood on — and there is no funnier word than "foot," and nothing more worth praising than the feet of mankind — were all gone. No more toes existed, no more arches, no more heels — at least in the strictly anatomical sense.

And this was not all. For, in place of the feet they had formerly employed, and often flexed with enjoyment after stripping the coverings from them after a hard day's work, men and women and children and babies possessed wheels. Everyone in America had these: small but efficient sets of four wheels per leg, affixed to the ankles. They worked wonderfully, moving with ease and swiftness. They were on a sort of swivel-dingus which doctors are not, even yet prepared to tell the world about (doctors must be very careful about divulging their knowledge to mankind; they have taken oaths about this) and which enabled their owners to skim about almost anywhere and in any direction with remarkable smoothness, as well as to lock the wheels in place for the navigation of stairways, hillsides, and so on. They were remarkable wheels, to put it mildly. And if at first nobody was glad about this — if, indeed, there was sweating and grunting and lamentation in the land about it, with leading evangelists holding prayer services to ask for the return of feet and with many clever scientists assigned

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immediately to the problem of foot renewal — still, in time, the virtues of the wheels became manifest.

Think a moment, footed friend. If you lost your feet you might seem to be losing a great deal — old friends, old steady companions, old comfortable toe-twitchers — but if, at the same time, you were given a marvelous device at the bottom of each leg which kited you everywhere you wanted to go, in a hurry, and which through mere *thinking* on your part, obeyed your every ambulant wish; what then? But perhaps the idea is too hard to get used to in haste. Let us review just for a few breaths the impact of wheeled bodies upon our Republic.

The newspapers were shoutingly indignant. A well-known editor of a giant metropolitan daily (he had been introduced just like that, thousands of times, in his public life) wakened and raged. He learned very quickly to use the devices — nobody had any trouble about *that*. The second he thought, "I want to be over at the bureau drawer where my underwear is so I can start getting dressed for the day —" whoosh, there he was, the wheels nimbly scooting him over the carpet. (The wheels didn't seem to harm anything they touched. They did not make deep imprints or leave scars.) Later that morning when he thought, "How the hell can I drive my car to the office, with wheels on my legs?" — the problem was, all at once, solved for him. For he found himself leaving the place where this question had arisen — at the doorway of his garage — and skating down the sidewalk and then moving merrily along the street, not far from the curb. It was a beautiful day, and he enjoyed the sensation. He had not roller-skated since he was sixteen, but the motion was much the same — with the exception of the fact that he didn't have to make any effort at all and that his progress seemed more like peril-stripped flying. The wheels took him, he didn't take the wheels. He found himself liking the feeling so much that, for a trickle of time, a smile spread over his sober features. He met numerous other gentry who were enjoying the same locomotion. There were, among them, lovely girls with rising breasts and sweet, clean haunches, all skimming along, their wheels making only a mild whistling on the pavement — the wheels were remarkably silent, it must be noted — and many other people waving one to another in gentle excitement as they sped. Young matrons fled on their ways; toddlers did not toddle, but mildly whizzed; and the world seemed made for this exhilarating, perhaps addlepated, but reliable form of getting around. But the editor, the moment he reached his office that morning —

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after locking the wheels to enter the elevator and after ascending to the eighteenth floor with an increasingly somber look upon his jowls — the editor, once behind his desk, remembered sagely that he was a molder of public opinion and that he, along with all the other millions in America — for a frantic survey had shown that the affliction spread from coast to coast — that he and all the country had been somehow conned. With a face as long as that last sentence he began pushing buttons, yelling down phones, and generally raising hob. He called in his minions, who came streaming, gliding to him.

"Look," he said. "This is an outrage. For centuries this most civilized nation on earth — if you skip the British, and let's — and maybe the Chinese, but for Godsakes don't get into *that* — this nation has had feet. Now it doesn't. Now, by the flowering bones of Walt Whitman, we can't any longer set off down the road with a carefree and casual, open-hearted saunter. We have these —" He leaned back in his swivel chair and lifted his left leg to reveal the appendage gleaming there. "— *wheels*." He put a terrible snort into the word. He brought his left leg down and leaned forward savagely over his desk, clasping his knotty hands. "We've been cursed," he said. "It is the curse of God Himself, come upon us. It just this second came to me." His face got dreamy for the moment. "Did you notice, there wasn't hardly any traffic this morning? A few plug-along trucks and a damned scooter or two. But that's about it. The freeways were open and there wasn't much smog. I imagine before long we can stop building highways. The lack of engine noise, the absence of honking and all that junk, was terrific, too. A *pure* feeling . . . as you all know by now, these devices obey thought. They haven't any motor or anything, but there you are — they do what you want 'em to." He had almost relaxed; he stiffened. "Are we going to take this standing still? — or rolling around?"

He glared around at the members of his editorial staff, who shook their heads. One or two said "No!" bravely.

"You're fornicating right we're not," said the editor, living up to his outspoken reputation. "We're going to plunge to the bottom of it and find out why we've all gotten so wicked that the Lord God Jehovah has punished us for our sins. We're going to rip our subscribers wide open and set the pace for a full-scale investigation of this blight." He paused, steaming, and stared again.

Somebody — it was an old copyeditor — said, "Chief, couldn't

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it be construed as a gift?" He fidgeted a trifle under the editor's strong frown. He went on, "I mean, you take a thing like this — unprecedented —" He shook his head and gazed down absently at his own wheels. He looked up again. "A thing like this — well, it's happened *only* here in America. Mightn't this be a *good* miracle that's come from, well, from Heaven?"

Everybody looked at the editor, holding breath to see what he'd say to that. He said, "Balderdash!" and everybody relaxed. "A gift? From Heaven? More likely an affliction from a God Who is utterly sick of us all and Who, after all these patient years, is having His little joke. A miracle? That I grant you, but I, for one, am already getting homesick for the old bunions. No, Eben, you're senile. Now, here's our policy line. We're going to blast the moral tone and temper of America as it's never been blasted. We're going to ask *why* this happened and if it wasn't a direct result of the way things have been going lately in Washington. It frosts me, it *really* frosts me —" He banged his desk and dislodged a small inkwell. He did not notice. "— to think that the Russians've still got their feet. What's God thinking of? How conversant *is* He with the situation? But never mind, never mind. The main thing is, attack. Cindy," he told his secretary, "take this all down. . . ." She whipped over to his side, moving so smoothly that it was a deep pleasure to watch her go, and the editor said, "Here's the first Anti-Sin, Wake up America, Get off Your Wheels and Get back on Your Feet editorial. Clear the decks."

What this editor who had buried his good feeling about the wheels had said about the Russians still having *their* feet, was quite true. They had their feet and so did every other foreign country. It was a piece of divine favoritism to give many a theologian pause. For, if the wheels were blessings (an unpopular attitude there at the first), then it seemed peculiar of the Deity to restrict them to the legs of U.S. citizens. And if, conversely, they were punishments (at the outset, quite the most popular opinion), why had not the evil outlanders and Asiatics and so forth received their comeuppances and lost their feet? It was a dizzying question, enough to make tall men small and small men smaller. Utilizing some of those amazing, often accurate survey-methods which have made America's public-relations men renowned throughout the world, our people found in the coming weeks that the first surveys and reportage had

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been correct — that it was, indeed, only the United States that had been so robbed, and so endowed. First rumors solidified; everybody else still had feet. A modest but enterprising manufacturer began the marketing of false feet — "With the real old skin-feel," as his ads said — but, somehow, there was little demand for his product, and he switched back to the manufacture of contraceptives and off-brand toothpastes. Hardest hit, at first, were the makers of shoes; the shoe lobby, always active in Washington, nearly expired, in a body, of rage the day after the whole change came about. They sided with the editor whom we have just met, to a man, and in turn they got the leather tanners worked up, and the leather tanners got the stockyard workers agitated, and there was about as much unrest as usual in the land, but for different reasons. Most newspapers sided with the influential editor's viewpoint (it is always more bracing to damn than the bless, to harry than to praise, as William Blake found out a long time ago), and headlines were black with portent. AMERICA,THINK! they thundered. NO SOUL, NO SOLE. TODAY, YOUR FEET; TOMORROW, WHO KNOWS? LIVE PURELY, AND TAKE HEED! (It is always simpler to find the evil in man than the good, too. And William Blake knew that, as well, but managed to find the blazing good, even in a tiger.)

But gradually, as the months went by, a beautiful thing happened. The great tirade against American manners and morals fell of its own weight, simply because having wheels was so enjoyable. Men and women and children discovered that wheels were great. That there ought always to have been wheels attached to their legs. That they did not see quite how they had existed without them. All the new babies born after the Day of the wheel-Coming had wheels — tiny ones, which grew with the growth of the children — just below their charming small ankles. Every freshly born child in the United States came into being complete with wheels. And even though the car manufacturers were next to suffer — they suffered much more loudly than the shoe lobby, and predicted the downfall of Free Enterprise, which, in those days, was a substance nobody knew much about, but which everybody felt solemnly was a great thing, like gasoline additives — they got over it, in time.

Of course it *did* take time, many years. The first year was chaotic. Aside from absolutely necessary journeys of some length, nobody used cars to speak of any longer — even modest journeys of thirty or

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fifty miles could be neatly, quietly accomplished on one's own wheels. And it was such a pleasure not to drive — just to hook your add-a-wagon ("Ad-wags," as they were called) to your shoulders with your belongings dumped in it and take off, your own wish skimming you wherever you wanted to go. Those who went on longer trips across the country increasingly flew, or used trains, which regained their old popularity under careful management; such travelers found themselves impatient to land or to pull in at their destined stations so they could return to the pleasure of using their own wheels once more. Foreign nations sent envoys in ever-growing numbers to study the construction of our wheels; it did them no good, and attempts to build imitations failed badly, even in Japan. Vast stretches of highway were, of course, still used — but because of the artfulness of the wheels, the almost *tender* manner in which these moved over any surface, the highways were not beaten to hell and stood up nobly under throngs of wheelers. As for cities — it was not unusual, of a summer morning, to look down Fifth (or even Sixth) Avenue and to see the streets full of wheeling morning arrivals, nobody running into anyone else (the very *thought*-power built into the wheels seemed to preclude this) and everybody as genial as jonquils. There was a rhythm to wheeling, a satisfactory ripple of the whole body, that gave rise to songs in its praise. One follows:

As we roll with a free and unfettered glide
Through the bountiful joys of our countryside,
All alert and awake to its plumage and pride,
We say, "*This* is the real way to ride, to ride,"
We say, "Thank you, thank you, for *wheels*!"

With the floating of the years, attitudes altered; weavers of socks, makers of women's hosiery, simply switched their styles (a small band of elastic clasped each ankle, ending just above where the foot had once been), and the car manufacturers and the shoemakers were heard to simmer down. The vaunted Free Enterprise which had been very closely allied with the making of automobiles in America did not seem to have been terribly important; the nation did not fall apart. And, presently, in a matter of a decade, it was noticed that the foliage along the highways was becoming itself again, as it had been in the nostalgic memories of old men — full, luscious, and as green as Ireland, with an ample breadth it had not owned for many years. The Dutch Elm Blight vanished, and elms again pros-

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pered. There appeared alongside highways (and in towns, and in cities, and on the fringes of towns and cities) glades where unicorns might have danced and naked happy people held parties for the simple bursting gladness of being alive and able to breathe. Music itself gained a new something; to the usual scale was added a kind of horizontal glissando which spoke of something bright that had always been dormant in the arts. Sports of all kinds went through transitions. Baseball was a mighty event to watch, the rules altered to require (in view of the dazzling speeds obtainable) *three* trips around the bases to complete a home run, and there was no such thing as a one-base hit any more, it had to be *two* or you were out. Basketball was a flashing greatness, and track stars were those with the fastest and wiliest set of wheels. The losses suffered by manufacturers of all kinds — the most serious, of course, being those same automobile men — were gradually offset and balanced in other ways: people who had, more or less, barely tolerated the arts were, if not won over to them, at least made cognizant of them and became more understanding about them.

In fact, America was changing deeply. It was outdoors more than it had ever been. Winter wheeling, even in snow, was not uncomfortable if one were warmly wrapped above the wheels. Another decade's passage saw scientists (who did not seem to keep such a vigilant eye on our doom as they once had) discovering that we were breeding a race of rather wondrous persons, better muscled, and with keener brains, than had been those forebears who, trapped by the limited capacity of their feet, had cut their body motions to short junkets around the house, or a few games of tennis or golf, or swimming a bit; the point was that we no longer drove from this place to that, we wheeled, with the whole body engaged in the operation, flexing and swinging to the various textures of the pavement or the cobbles (yes; wheels could handle any substance) and carried along by our wish, with some deeper energy added. Orthopedic surgeons, having made the transition to wheel examiners with hardly a ripple in their psyches, were kings among men, highly respected and showered with largesse. This is not to say that anyone ever discovered the inmost secret of the wheels; dissection did no good at all. They were of a substance not found on land or sea or in the air, that was all. There were a few tragedies by the wayside: men, and a few women (though very few women, for they adjusted much more responsively than men) who could not forget

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their feet, created a Foot Cult — a hardy, if baffled, band which raised small temples within which effigies of the human foot, and paintings of the same, and old-fashioned shoes (the very word *shoe* became funny, as the word *foot* had once been) were worshiped. Without any such foofaraw, the museums of America all had life-size, and some over life-size, reproductions of feet, upon which, usually on rainy Saturday mornings, children under the guidance of their teachers gazed with awe and only a little giggling, while museum guides wheeled them around and told them of the passing of the foot from history.

At last, half a hundred years after the first shock, there was no wheel-opposition of any kind. (The editor who had begun the crusade for moral purity in America had long since died. Before death, he had become reconciled to wheels, even their secret appreciator and champion. It had to be a secret with him, for he was a man of public conviction.) Those evangelists who had shrieked and mourned and pummeled their breasts were, at least those of them still living, also reconciled. The Age of the Wheel had begun as man could never have dreamed it would.

And wasn't it odd that artificial wheels had almost died away? Odd, and considered in retrospect, awesome. The petroleum industry was now small but cheerful. The allied industries went quietly about their converted businesses. Agrarianism flourished — by living outdoors so much, our people had discovered the goodness of air once more. Certain skilled scientists were learning to control the weather on a limited regional basis which, it was anticipated, would eventually spread to the entire nation. Crops had never looked finer, and it was no longer necessary to drive through choking traffic for hundreds of miles to look upon Nature at her most natural. Farms crept up to the edges of cities, and what could be more elevating than to see the farmers rolling along their bean rows, hands in hip pockets, their wheels churning softly through the loam, making a delicate sound like the hulls of small ships cutting fresh water?

One morning, the President of the United States announced in a nationwide telecast that Peace had been declared. (He had a large audience, which was unusual. Not unusual because he was not popular; he was well liked, even loved. Unusual only because television watching as a sport had died out, for the most part, except among the very young who still could not wheel well and the very old who were wheelbound. Casual-

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ly, scientists had said that they thought this was probably due to the better brains the populace had grown in the past fifty years.) Clearing his throat, lifting his head, the President told everyone:

"The reason Peace has come is because we genuinely desired it. It is necessary for almost everybody to want something before it comes, when that something is as large as Peace is. In the past, one faction and another in America kept us from true desire. Now we have it. Now our old enemies are no longer enemies. All weapons are being dismantled under a world-wide system supervised by one hundred American citizens, and one hundred citizens from each of all the other nations — one hundred per nation, which adds up to a great many people. I'll give you the details later, but that's basically it. And to what do we owe it? Every schoolchild knows." Here, eyes glistening, the President signaled to the cameras and they closed in on his wheels. From the crowd in front of the White House, listening and watching the live broadcast from this vantage point, a huge cheer went up. It rang and went on ringing while the cameras remained in extreme close-up on a handsome and moving down-shot of the presidential wheels. Then the Wheel-Hymn — "Oh whence ye came we do not ken but how ye slide all peoples know" — was played by Army, Navy, and Marine and Coast Guard bands and sung by massed choirs, whose leaders stood on their heads with decorum and slowly waved wheels in flashing arcs through the sunlight.

Four years later, in Gallup, New Mexico, an eight-pound boy was born with feet. His name was Ronald Starr, and the event was not immediately made known to anyone but his mother and father because his birth took place in a slaternly cabin on the town's rim, and his father served as doctor and midwife. The Starrs were normal, wheeled people. His mother's reaction to her child was one of both nausea and love. She could not hate him because he was hers; perfectly formed, in all respects but the one, he stared up at her with his eyes out of focus and made a slight whimpering noise, and she clutched him to her. Outside, the wind blew dust devils down the street. Listening to it moan, Mrs. Starr said fiercely, "I won't tell 'em. You're a freak, but I won't let 'em know. I'll guard you, baby. I'll keep you hid."

"Better do that," Mr. Starr said. "He's the first for fifty years." Even a ne'er-do-well like Starr knew his history and took national pride in it.

The boy grew up lurking in

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corners, often spending days at a time with his feet wrapped in burlap to conceal them in case a neighbor should enter. The Starrs had no near, and certainly no good, neighbors, which made things simpler. When Ronald was five, Mr. Starr moved his family — Ronald was the only Child; the Starrs were afraid of having another after that first experience — to a desert hut beside one end of a vast ranch whose fences he was supposed to keep to moderately good repair for the pittance he received from the ranch foreman. It was a decent arrangement, which suited Starr, since he saw the foreman only about once a month and then just for his wages and a casual word. The ranch was not prosperous; it lay in territory once used for the testing of bombs, and with the best will in the world it would probably never grow much but some scrub crops again. It was an end-of-the-world place, bought for a minor song and only maintained for what it might eventually bring when the bomb poisons had leached from the soil. Ronald grew to young manhood with the sun and moon for company on good days and nights and the harsh winds and dust alongside him on bad ones. A stringy boy, he was nevertheless filling out nicely and getting some good grape to his shoulder muscles and a handy look in his dark meditative eyes the afternoon the ranch foreman, coming up quietly on his dusty wheels, found Ronald asleep in the shade of a tall cactus.

The foreman was flabbergasted. His lips twitched; he knuckled his eyes. When he opened them, Ronald was still there, and Ronald's feet were still there — dark tan, like the rest of his body, bare and shameless, under the ragged fringe of Ronald's blue jeans. The foreman looked his fill, then walked a little way off and was sick. He did not waken Ronald. That night he rapped at the door of the Starr's hut and asked Mr. Starr to step outside for a minute. The interview was short and noisome.

"You say he's American," grated the foreman. "You say you can show me proof, because he looks like you and your woman. Don't you see how bad that makes it? Suppose he grows up, meets a girl, has kids. What happens? You know the law about not marrying a footed alien. You know it's the greatest law, the big one — the one that's stopped most murder and thieving and lying and hell and darkness and damnation in the world. The one that keeps us our wheels, that got us our Peace. There's just one thing to do. You do it."

Mr. Starr hung his head. He whispered, "When?"

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"Tonight," the foreman said. And he handed Mr. Starr an object, an antique — guns were not popular any longer — which glittered dully under the cloud scud.

Neither of them saw Ronald, a shadow in the hut's doorway. A shadow which instantly, without a backward look at the somber place, detached itself from the doorway and slid around the corner of the broken-down hut and merged with the whipping shadows, the delicate uneasiness, of the desert.

He lived for more than a year in a cave on the edge of the desert, not well, but with enough self-sufficiency to have guaranteed the truth that he had pioneer blood. In the cave a rock pool glimmered, and from it he scooped enough precious water to stay alive while the sun fried the world beyond. At night he hunted, charily, his weapons his hands and his secret his speed. Not nearly as fast as a wheeled and whole man, he was nonetheless amazingly silent and quicksilver-quick. Through the white moonlight over the mottled desert, between the small ghostlike cacti he ran. And when he had caught the jack rabbit, he killed it as quickly as he could with mercy and need. Nobody saw him but the occasional moon. On the edge of sleep, or in his dreams, he would remember, as from another place deeper than this world, his mother; he would cry out, whimper, thinking himself back with her, remembering perhaps too in that dream her face he had not even looked back upon when he left. (His father did not matter to him. He did not hate his father, or fear him, or think of him.) In the winter when the snow came — it was not heavy, but fierce and light like a white fox — he lay unshivering, rolled in a ball; he went hunting then with terrible odds against him but with persistence until he found food. In the worst of his hunger he made a trip to the nearest town, starting at sunfall and running most of the way. In the dead of night he burglarized a food store, entering by a rear window. When the weather had warmed but game was still scarce, he tried this a second time. A man with a shotgun (also an antique; the American Southwest was the last area to give up its fondness for weapons) was waiting for him this time; the man fired.

Ronald was hit in the left arm. Bleeding, he raced away through the dark. He was staggering with fatigue, and the sun was rising, when he heard the train in the distance. It was moving beyond a slight rise up which he climbed. With the last of his strength he mounted the grade and swung aboard the freight train, which was

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just getting up speed after stopping to take on cars. Ronald just got his fingers to clamp around the iron ladder and hauled himself up and lay down on top of the car, before he fainted. The train, also, was faint. Most trains now were much newer, in shining shape. This one was making its final journey across the continent before being broken up for scrap and tossed on the junk heap. It had a small crew, and none of the crew saw Ronald.

It was afternoon before he could leave the train. He did this by forcing his stiff arm to move and by conquering the rebellion of his hunger-weak body until he could fling himself from the car at a point where a sand shelf canted down from the rails. In the sand he crawled a short way and then fainted again. His hair was as hot as the sun, and his veins seemed empty of life in the same way that his mouth was empty of words and juices and song. (In the cave on some days he had sung to himself, a lonely, but outgoing singing like a Navajo chant.)

When he opened his eyes there was a girl. She was dark, as dark as he was, but this was only her hair; the skin was creamy and lucent, fresh and tan but not burned deep with sun. She said, "Mother, his eyes are open." He lay looking at her. The room smelled tremendously of flowers; he had never smelled flowers so fragrant, but somewhere in his mind and the texture of his inheritance he had expected them to smell this good. Behind the girl, in the clean quiet room, a woman came peering at him. She said, "Can you talk, son?"

He made a grating noise. She moistened his lips with a sponge. "Not much water, at first," she said. "A little more, now in a little while. I know. I'm a nurse, son. Tanya found you. We were out driving. It's Thursday, and we drive on Thursday, because, goodness knows, she's got to get a little air. Well —" A peculiar secretive look came on the woman's face. Ronald remembered the same look on his mother's face all the days of his childhood. "You're the fifth we've found, boy. The fifth. There *are* some like you . . . like Tanya."

She rambled on. It didn't make much sense, but he listened anyway and watched the girl. Her eyes were wary but calm and accepting; she sat close to the bed. The woman said, "You're in Texas. Big Bend country. The door locks, if you have to lock it. Tanya knows; she'll lock it for you if anybody comes in the front. We're off a ways from people, here, but sometimes we get some company. I'll talk good and loud in the front room if anybody comes." The woman wheeled off, and went out, shutting the door.

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Tanya said, "Can you understand? Do you know what's happened?" She nearly whispered as if she wouldn't ever really disturb him or hurt him. As if she wouldn't take a chance on that at any time. He went on watching her, and at last he shook his head, which did not hurt so much now.

"Look," she said. She got up and moved out into the room. Then in the low flush of sunlight that came in under the almost fully drawn blind, he saw her feet. They were pretty feet, coral pink in the sun stripe, and joyously shaped. the bones of the ankles were fragile-looking and not like his own hard projecting anklebones. Her toes moved just a trace on the straw matting in the sun. "You too," she said. "You too. You're the fifth. I hope you'll stay here. None of the others stayed with us. But maybe you can. They thought it was too dangerous — having more'n one like me in the same place. But I wish they'd stayed. I wish *you* to stay."

He did not answer, but stretched a fraction, feeling his horny-soled, capable feet move under the cool sheet, his own toes brush the clean linen.

It was only a few months later that Ronald and Tanya were discovered by the world. Who had tipped the world off remains in doubt; perhaps it was the tired-eyed man who came to read the light meter one day and, peering in past the door which was open a crack (even coyotes are careless sometimes), saw Tanya reading to Ronald from a primer, reading the words with great care as he concentrated with effort and looked over her shoulder, sometimes at her lips and sometimes at the large-printed words on the page. Tanya was wearing slippers at the time — an old pair, found in an attic years before, which did not quite fit her small feet. But Ronald wore no shoes, and though the blind was drawn against the day, a reading lamp shone beside the chair. But who told somebody (who, in turn, informed somebody else in the endless chain of rumor and spreading knowledge) is of no matter now. No matter today at all.

What is of consequence is that, when the headlines and other announcements burst upon the nation, a sensation was created that has had no equal before or since. Descendants of the editor whom we met at the beginning of this report awoke and howled. They trembled, not with indignation, but in loud fear and succeeded immediately in transmitting their personal vapors and moanings to millions. Such is the power of rapid communication

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(which is not quite the word; communication should mean more) that the march upon the Washington jail in which, by that time, Ronald and Tanya and Tanya's mother were incarcerated was barely thwarted by United States troops. (They were not well-drilled troops; their weapons were still slick with cosmoline. For so many good years nobody had taken drilling seriously.)

Then came the seesaw of the courts. At first the sessions were closed, but public opinion ran too high for that. It ran as high as the Mississippi in spate. So the sessions, with the judges and their solemnity (and the faces of Ronald and Tanya, in their locked-up, set-apart seriousness) and the law's perturbed majesty, were televised. Now, once more, television sets got a big run for their money. There were pockets of resistance here and there — small groups of persons who said, largely in privacy and just among-themselves, that the penalty was too much. Starr and Tanya couldn't help the way they'd been born, could they? said these people. Capital punishment had been abolished for quite a while, said these people. It did not go with the health and sanity of America any more.

But there will always be screwballs, against-the-grainers. There will always be those who do not appreciate what they have, enough to kill for it. And when, in the ninth-day testimony, Tanya's mother broke down — being wheeled made her basically honest, basically one-hundred-percent American, said a commentator who got carried away; she *had* to tell the truth — when Tanya's mother broke down and admitted that she and her daughter had found, and even sought out and harbored, four *other* footed Americans, sentiment cracked wide open into panic. The trial broke into uproar. The Great Foot Hunt began; never was there a more intent, bloodthirstier, or more widely spread hunt. Weaponry grew overnight into fashion again. In all streets came the knocking of the Foot Troopers; one's door opened to them, while they searched one's home and picked over one's most intimate and cherished and sovereign belongings with nimble, ravenous fingers. They looked for any telltale bit of evidence — a toenail clipper, the graceful print of an arch. The possession of a shoe was a criminal offense. The Foot Cults had long since fallen apart, but descendants of Foot Culters were jailed for life. Out of the museums went the marble-and-plaster feet, to be broken up with yells and screams of triumph, while bonfires were lighted nearby and the flames

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licked the stony, cracked toes.

Abroad, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television carried horrified stories of the madness that had come upon America. The President of the Republic of France offered asylum to any footed U.S. citizens who could make it to that country. Great Britain and Germany followed suit. Russia came out with a flat declaration that barbarism had come to the wheeled peoples and that this persecution was a reflection on *all* the footed, of every nation.

It did not matter to the course of the trial. All these objections were voiced by the footed; so they could not be valid or reasoned statements. The pockets of resistance were not heard from now in the wave of terror. The four other Americans Tanya's mother knew to have feet were found, and twenty-five more were discovered living in an abandoned mine shaft in West Virginia. An elderly recluse in Boston, a blue-haired patrician lady who seldom left her mansion, was dragged forth into daylight by a frenzied mob, her feet, which she had encased in expensive thick lace shawls, were exposed to the light; and she was stoned to death near the spot where Paul Revere had once made excellent silver teapots.

On the night of October 20, in that year, Ronald and Tanya were executed by a firing squad. Owing to public demand, this too was televised. The four renegades who had been sheltered by Tanya and her mother, and the twenty-five hapless mine-shaft hiders were then disposed of by other firing squads, offscreen, while a grim-jawed commentator gave a play-by-play description of their going. "Please God," he said, "no more Americans so afflicted will be found." And then he added, with a startled walleyed look at the camera, "That is, please God, no more *exist*."

He shouldn't have fretted about that near *faux pas*.

No more such Americans existed.

And on the following morning, no more wheeled Americans existed either. Our wheels were gone overnight, as they had come to us all those years before. But this time we had neither feet *nor* wheels. And babies born after the dawn of October 31, 20———, had no feet, no wheels; they were exactly like the rest of us. They had nothing to stand on.

It could be worse, of course. Thank God for the plasticized articles we use now. "Foot" remains a funny word, humorous in essence, though it is hard to remember just where the laugh comes from. We have many comforting slogans. "Oh, praise the feet of men!" we say. (Even if obviously artificial and stiff to

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handle.) I am old and have never learned to use them properly. Like my relatives and friends, I give the greeting, "There's joy afoot." I wish it did more good. Incantation is very soothing. But we amateur historians have to tell the truth now and then.

Well, it could be worse. We have what we have developed. We shuffle around a little. The automobile and airbus and weapons industries keep booming. Cancer is rife. There are other malignancies unthought of in earlier times. We are rather obese. Artificial foods taste strawier. The last lawn, of real grass, is on well-guarded display in Kansas City. The wars drag on, and the threats continue. The nights draw in.

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FUTUREWORLD IMPERFECT AND AN EDGAR RICE BURROW

Perhaps the most maligned minority in cinema is the robot/android. If they are not portrayed as menacing or destructive (Gog, the robot Maria in *Metropolis*, and, of course, Dr. Frankenstein's durable creation), they're made cutesey (Robby in *Forbidden Planet* and that dreadful trio in *Silent Running*). There are exceptions, certainly, such as Gort and the morally ambiguous humanoids, but for the most part, movies have not been kind to the man-made man.

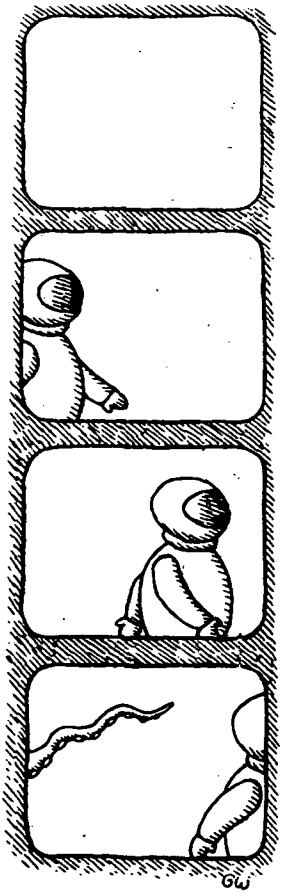
(And I have the sneaky hunch that that robot cop series which will have hit TV by the time this sees print is not going to help the situation any.)

The film *Westworld* was epitomally anti-robot, having to do with Delos, a neo-Disney World where the android population runs amok and slaughters the guests. *Futureworld* picks up three years after the "disaster at Westworld" (their phrase, but *re* the movie, I couldn't agree more). But there's further hanky panky at Delos.

Two intrepid news reporters (Peter Fonda and Blythe Danner) accept an invitation from the management of Delos to do a story on

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



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the "new" Delos, presumably to the effect that it's no longer possible to be done in by a murderous android. But Fonda, after a good deal of poking about in the back stage area ("This is about as interesting as a visit to the waterworks," complains Danner at one point), uncovers *the truth.*

Everyone at Delos is a robot (as in *W'world,* the word android is not used) except their mad scientist creator (who bears a vague resemblance to Henry Kissinger). And what's more, they are cloning heads of state who visit Delos, destroying the originals and sending their creatures out to rule the world. To add insult to injury, they have even cloned the two reporters.

You can guess from there. The two pairs of duplicates shoot it out, Danner in the abandoned Westworld section, Fonda back in the waterworks after an extended chase. After the two confrontations, the audience is left in the dark as to which of each pair survived until the final minute of the movie. I would bet a cookie that three endings were shot for *Futureworld,* one positive, one negative, and one ambiguous — the lady or the tiger kind of thing. While I won't say which is used (critics have *some* morals), it was the wrong one so far as I'm concerned.

But I won't be too hard on *Futureworld.* For what it's worth, I liked it better than *Westworld,* though there's still that initial premise that's hard to swallow: that an advanced bit of technology such as these "robots" would be used only in a posh amusement partk. And what you see of the other "worlds" (Romanworld, Medievalworld) still look like B historical movies.

But Fonda and Danner play together nicely, adding a bit more wit and personality to their characters than one is used to in the average s/f movie. The film is at least mildly diverting through most of its length, and there is one moment of inspiration, where a game of chess is played on an outsized board with living holographic figures.

But to get back to my original premise, the robots here are shown not only to be a menace, one of them is shown to be cute (a 4000 model rescued from the junk pile, who cheats at cards). I suggest a robots and androids anti-defamation league that could picket movies such as this one.

I've been on an Edgar Rice Burroughs kick this week. ERB was my intro to s/f more years ago than I'll mention here, and I return to his books periodically. This time it was the Mars series, which along with the Pellucidar books are my favorite ERB works. The Pellucidar books have two marvelous concepts

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contained therein: since Pellucidar is the inner surface of the hollow Earth, there is no time there, because there are no astronomical phenomena to mark it; and, of course, the horizon goes *up*, a visual concept that Burroughs returns to again and again.

Aside from my Barsoomian literary orgy, I saw the film version of *At the Earth's Core*, the novel which is the first of the Pellucidar series, in which hero David Innes and scientist Abner Perry take off in a mechanical burrowing device, discover Pellucidar, and conquer its reptilian rulers, the Mahars.

It is unfair to judge a film by the literary work from which it comes, but in this case, it's downright impossible not to. Doug McClure is hardly my idea of a Burroughs hero (or any hero, for that matter). Paunchy and triple chinned, he looks almost matronly. Peter Cushing plays Abner as a ditsy British professor, a far cry from the original Yankee inventor; nonetheless, it's a nicely eccentric performance (depend on those British actors!). The role of Dian the Beautiful is taken by a girl who is just that.

Pellucidar's dinosaurian population is played by anonymous people in silly rubber suits, as are the Mahars with bat wings and parrot heads added. There are only about six of them, so it's not too hard to vanquish them (and they fly about as well as Mary Martin).

There *are* a couple of four-footed saurians about, one a shovel mouthed stegosaurus type with a rather endearing waddle, the other somewhat the same but breathing fire from a very obvious pipe in its throat.

As for Pellucidar's major feature (the horizon), it's spoiled here because Pellucidar is just a big cave. Oddly enough, there's one long shot with a painted drop that does suggest an upward horizon almost successfully.

And to add insult to injury, the natives speak English flawlessly.

What would I have said if I *hadn't* known the book? That this is an endlessly tedious, silly movie. The ERB estate is credited with a supervisor — he should be ashamed of himself!

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Concerning assassinations and astronauts, and if it sounds as if you've heard that song before, well Mr. Utley confesses that the story was written in part as an affectionate parody of a well-known F&SF contributor . . .

Losing Streak

by STEVEN UTLEY

I am committed to assassinating the man who went to Mars, but it might not be such a bad idea to start by strangling my wife. I decide this without having to think about it for very long: the notion occurs to me precisely at midnight, just as the hall clock rings the first beat of the new day, and it has taken root by the twelfth chime. Yes, it might be best to kill my wife first, by way of declaring myself free of the losing streak. And it would be easy, a simple matter of rolling over onto her, straddling her, pinning her arms to the mattress with my knees, putting my hands on her neck. Pressing my thumbs against her throat, fracturing the little bone there. Easy. I have heard that death by strangulation is quick if the job is done right, and I have resolved to start doing things right for a change.

My wife sleeps at my side, snoring softly, dreaming angry dreams, no doubt. We argued after dinner, then made the mistake of trying to reconcile matters in bed. Another catastrophe. There is no silence like that between husband and wife in the aftermath of a failed coupling. Never mind, I tell myself, it's all part of the losing streak. Soon I shall be done with it.

My wife is a disappointed and disappointing woman. Her marriage of eleven years, six months and, ah, seven days has not lived up to the great expectations she had as a bride at the age of nineteen. She claims that I have not fulfilled her. I cannot make her understand that I have not fulfilled even myself.

Strangling her as she sleeps would be a proper beginning, an appropriate gesture of contempt for the past dozen years of my life. She is, after all, another part of the losing streak, and I am determined to change my life. I think about strangling her until the hall clock

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has announced the half hour. Then I fall asleep and dream of the day ahead, when I shall shoot the man who went to Mars.

I am lying in bed, half awake, half listening to my wife as she busies herself in the kitchen. I am, I notice, tumescent; my groin throbs with an ache that is not really pleasurable but not quite painful, either. I raise the sheets and cluck my tongue reproachfully at my penis. Too late, I tell it, where were you last night, when I needed you? But my gonads insist that amends can be made. I think of my wife in the kitchen and experience a sunburst of desire, a vivid image of her down on her hands and knees in the middle of the floor, flanked by the refrigerator and the pantry, her ratty dressing gown pushed up around her thickening waist, my hands separating the fleshy hemispheres of her ass ... I can't remember the last time one or the other of us made any sexual overtures on the spur of the moment. No more recently, probably, than the sixth or seventh month of our marriage. The thought of my creeping out of bed and attacking her while her attention is fixed on a balky can of quickie biscuits seems less and less appealing by the second. My sunburst fades. I wilt.

It's just as well, I assure myself. It is enough that I have spared her life, without making love to her on the grimy linoleum tile.

A sharp odor of burning wafts into the bedroom. Yes, just as well. Now she can't use me as an excuse for having ruined the bacon again. I get up and check the time. I still have six hours to wait out before I play my part in the ceremonies to be held in honor of the man who went to Mars.

My brother Ed, two and one half years my senior, called me last night.

I am always happy to hear from him. We have always been close, remarkably close, even as children. Since going our separate ways in the world — up in his case, down in mine — we have exchanged brief but affectionate letters at an average rate of four times per annum, and we always get together when we can. My failures and his successes notwithstanding, we continue to relate to each other.

Bigger than me, smarter, more durable, Ed has been my ideal for a long time, my ideal, my hero. I have never resented the fact that he is on top of the world; there is, I firmly believe, such a thing as a law governing the conservation of good fortune; I accept its dictates. Ed has always sincerely cared about me, helped me out when he had to, had sense enough to let me extricate myself, however painfully,

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from bad situations when I could manage it without his help. I appreciate that. The bond between us, forged in childhood, remains unsundered. "If there's *anything* you ever need from me, take it": the pact we made years ago.

Ed and I talked last night. I had the telephone clamped between my cheek and shoulder. My hands were busy with the rifle, cleaning it, oiling it.

"I wish I could drop by," Ed said, "and see you and the wife. But they keep me very busy. You know how it is. Maybe I'll be able to get away sometime tomorrow."

"Of course, Ed. I understand." I did understand, I still do, I always have. Ed is a busy man, always rushing about, doing things. His schedule is incredible. Lesser persons than my brother would crumble under the strain. "Maybe tomorrow."

"If I can get away. Promise." I heard him suck a long breath and realized then that he was wearier than he had been letting on. "Are you going to attend the ceremonies tomorrow afternoon."

"Wouldn't miss them for the world. Yes, I'll be there. I'll certainly be there." They have gone back to ceremonies now, more than a quarter of a century after the first manned spaceflights. Enough time has passed since then for the public to again be amazed by and appreciative of space exploration. Astronauts must once more be accorded the honors of old. Parades, speeches, television interviews. I will not miss the ceremonies, no.

"Well," Ed said. "How goes it with you these days?"

"Oh, much, much better." I wanted to tell him how I had made up my mind to break out of my pattern of failure, how I believed that the law governing the conservation of good fortune could be affected by outside phenomena, but I couldn't concentrate on an explanation, not while my hands were busy with the rifle, not while my wife sat at the far corner of the room, glowering, waiting for me to ring off so that she could launch into her usual tirade, the gist of which being Why Can't You Be At Least A *Little* Like Your Brother Ed? My eyes locked with hers for a second, and I wanted to tell her, too, that I would, I would be, I had decided that I would be more like my brother Ed in the future, that I was off the losing streak for good.

But my deeds will speak louder than words.

It always makes my wife nervous and irritable when I have the rifle out of its case indoors.

The rifle is the one real luxury I have allowed myself in the past five years. I like guns, the feel and smell of them, the *essence* of them. I am a

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pretty decent shot, and I expect to make a clean job of the man who went to Mars, one bullet through the head, fired at half the maximum effective range. He must die instantly, painlessly. I don't want to hurt him. After all, he has braved the dangers of outer space, traveled forty million miles to walk upon the Red Planet, forty million miles back to Earth, and he is entitled to some consideration.

I dropped out of college after three and one-half extremely unsatisfying semesters. My parents and my brother pretended resignation, though they all believed that *nobody* could Get Ahead, Amount To Something, without a full college education. I supported that belief. In quick succession, I had jobs as a bakery clerk, a carpenter, a laundry clerk, a delivery-van driver, a plastics cutter in an advertising-sign factory, an auto-parts salesperson, a shoe salesperson, a hydraulic-press operator. When I was twenty-one, I met, fell in love with and married the woman who, probably through sheer inertia on both our parts, is still my wife. Because we anticipated having a first baby within twelve months of our wedding, I managed to hold on to the hydraulic-press job for a while. No first baby has ever come. I have since been a vinyl-extruder operator, a used-car salesperson (for two days), another laundry clerk, a letter carrier, an assembly-line worker in a toy factory. My wife has worked off and on as a file clerk in various insurance offices. It is just as well that we have never had children, because we can barely keep outselves afloat as is. At the age of thirty-three, I am a tired, terrified man who goes to work at seven o'clock every weekday morning and operates at minimum efficiency until four-thirty in the afternoon. I am tired because the work is monotonous. I am terrified because of Simpson and Roark, two old men who stand on either side of me all day long, Simpson to my left, Roark to my right. They have, they tell me, worked on assembly lines all of their adult lives. They know of little else, they will never know more than they do now. They are each nearing the mandatory retirement age: when they reach it, they will go home to pursue their few avowed interests as best they may. They will die. They will be forgotten. They are already forgotten, these two disintegrating men whose dreams encompass nothing grander than dime-an-hour raises every eight months, next Sunday's televised football game and, at the wildest extreme, a piece of Vicki Foxe, the receptionist in the front office. And I, too, am already forgotten. I, who have dreamed of Mars.

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When Ed and I were children in the 1960s, we occasionally went to Mars and found it to be rather like the empty lot adjoining our parents' house. There were Martians, of course: they were malevolent but stationary beings that looked like elm trees.

"I am going to be an astronaut," I told Ed, quite sincerely. "I am going to be the first man to go to Mars." He smiled.

I have, of course, seen the telecasts from Mars. The planet's iron-oxide deserts are as bleak as the Moon's unrelievedly gray wasteland. As was the Moon in 1969, Mars has been a let-down for some people. They secretly harbored the hope that Life As We Know It would turn up, that the astronaut who stepped from the landing module would be greeted by John Carter and Dejah Thoris and invited home to Greater Helium for dinner. I do not share that foolish sense of disappointment. I am proud, and, I feel, justly so. What matters is not that I wasn't the one to go to Mars but that *someone* (not just *any*one: someone; the right person) was and did and has returned.

I am looking down the barrel of my rifle, through the telescopic sight, at the man who went to Mars. He stands among the dignitaries on the review stand, and he looks healthy, bright, reasonably confident of his ability to say something meaningful to the crowd that has come to pay homage to him, a true, an authentic hero. Like the heroes of that earlier Space Age, like the Wright brothers and Christopher Columbus, he has earned immortality for himself; he can go to his grave assured of the fact that he will never be forgotten, for his name has been inscribed indelibly in the Book of Human Progress. Immortality for the man who went to Mars.

And for the other man, the one who assassinated him. Afterwards, they will swarm up to my rooftop perch and bring me down. I will have lain my weapon aside by the time they reach me. I have no wish to be gunned down. I will fire the one shot necessary to kill the astronaut, and then I will surrender without a fight. Whatever happens after that will happen: my end is achieved as soon as I have fired. The losing steak that has kept me down for the past dozen years will be destroyed along with the flesh (but, ah, not the memory) of the man who went to Mars.

I am looking down the barrel of my rifle, through the telescopic sight, the crosshairs centered on the astronaut's tanned face, the past falling from me like scales, the endless succession of horrible jobs, the incessant verbal knife-fights with my wife, the condition of

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semipoverty, impotence, numbing terror of spending my entire life in total obscurity, going to my grave unnoticed, unnoticed, and I know, I *know*, in the instant before I squeeze the trigger, that he, this astronaut, this man who went to Mars, would understand if he knew what is about to happen, what I am about to do. Understand and approve. It would make him proud to know that I am finally about to make something of myself. We have a pact, Ed and I.

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DISCOVERY BY BLINK

I was interviewed the other day on the subject of immortality and maintained, rather insistently, that it was a bad thing. Immortality, I said, was bad for the species because it would halt its evolution, bad for society because the last generation would be made up of the same increasingly-dull individuals indefinitely, and bad for the individual because eventually he would prefer death to boredom. In fact, any society of immortals, I said, would merely shift the pattern from death by circumstance to death by will with perhaps little change in life expectancy after all.

All this, I think, was not what the interviewer wanted to hear. He therefore personalized the matter and said, "*Do you think you would* want to die someday, assuming you were in good health and could live forever if you chose."

"Certainly," I said, staunchly.

"When?"

"When I no longer felt the desire to write," I said.

"And when would that be?" he said.

"Never," I said — and killed my whole argument.

Another interviewer once tried to break down my stubborn resistance to any way of spending my life other than at the typewriter, by

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

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saying to me, "But suppose you knew you had only six months to live. What would you do then?"

And without hesitation, I said, "Type faster."

Well, what's wrong with that attitude? There are many people who are, or were, monomaniacally interested in whatever field of endeavor absorbed them. It's just that most of these fields are not as noticeable to the general public as writing is.

Suppose my mania involved the search for a new and as-yet-undetected planet? Who would see the existence of my madness except a few other astronomers?

Which, of course, brings me to the subject of planetary discoveries, which this article concludes.

In 1781, Uranus, the seventh planet of the Solar system, in order of increasing distance from the Sun, was discovered (see "The Comet That Wasn't," November 1976), and in 1846, Neptune, the eighth planet, was discovered (see "The Sea-Green Planet," December 1976). Was that the end?

No. Uranus had been an accident, but Neptune was glory and triumph, and no astronomer could resist the temptation to repeat that. Astronomers *wanted* more planets to exist.

And why not? The gravitational field of the Sun dominated space, without significant interference from even the nearest stars, for a distance at least a thousand times the distance of Neptune. Across that distance, even if we assumed each planet to be roughly twice as far from the Sun as the one before, there would be room for at least ten trans-Neptunian planets.

Of course, even if those trans-Neptunian planets existed, discovering them would be extraordinarily difficult.

For one thing, the father from the Sun a planet is, the less light it catches and reflects, and the less of that reflected light we ourselves would intercept. Thus, Saturn, at a distance of 1400 million kilometers from the Sun, shines brilliantly in our sky with a magnitude of -0.4 and is brighter than all but the three brightest stars.

Uranus, the next planet out, at a distance of 2800 million kilometers, has a magnitude of only 5.7, which makes it just barely visible to the unaided eye. Neptune, at a distance of 4500 million kilometers, has a magnitude of 7.6 and can never be seen by the unaided eye, but can be seen with a small telescope.

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The next planet beyond Neptune would have a magnitude of perhaps 12 or 13 at most and would be seen only with a large telescope. And those still further out might well be too dim to see with even the largest telescope at our disposal.

Still, astronomers can make out stars with magnitudes considerably dimmer than 12 or 13. Leaving the still more distant planets out of account, there seemed no reason to suppose, as the 19th Century wore to its end, that the ninth planet, the nearest of the trans-Neptunian planets (assuming it existed) could not be seen.

But even if it could, seeing wasn't enough. The dimmer the object you try to see in a telescope, the greater the number of stars of equal or greater brightness you will also see. Uranus has relatively few stars surrounding it in a telescopic view that are as bright as or brighter than itself. Neptune, which is much dimmer, is surrounded by many more stars that successfully compete, and the trans-Neptunian planet would be lost in a veritable snow-drift of stars.

Could the trans-Neptunian planet hidden among the star-powdering be identified? It would have two properties that would at once distinguish it as a planet: it would show a disc, which stars do not, and it would show motion relative to the nearby stars.

The trouble is that the farther a planet is, the less likely it is to show a perceptible disc. This is especially so if the planets beyond Neptune tend to grow smaller with distance, as can be reasonably argued they do. And as for motion, the farther a planet is, the slower that motion. In the case of the trans-Neptunian planet, then, you would be dealing with a particularly small disc and a particularly slow motion. Detection would be difficult.

One way of increasing the rather rotten odds against finding the planet is to try to figure out, at least roughly, where in the sky it might be and then concentrate our looking in that region.

Neptune was discovered because Uranus's orbit indicated the presence of a gravitational pull from beyond. From the nature of the effect of that pull on Uranus's motion, a rough idea was obtained as to the position and distance of Neptune, which was the source of that pull. Neptune was looked for in the indicated place, in the constellation Aquarius, and was found.

Could this process not be repeated? Could not the imperfections in Neptune's orbit be used to locate the ninth planet, and then its orbital imperfections used to locate the tenth planet, and so on?

There's a catch. The farther the planet, the longer it takes to complete

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one revolution about the Sun. The precision with which one can detect imperfections in the orbital movement depends upon the fraction of the turn it has completed.

Thus, Uranus circles the Sun in 84 years, and in 1846, when Neptune was discovered, Uranus had been under continuous observation for 65 years or for 0.77 of its revolutionary period. Neptune circles the Sun in 165 years and in 1900, when it had been under continuous observation for 53 years, it had completed only 0.32 of its revolutionary period.

So, as the 20th Century opened, Neptune's orbit was not yet known with sufficient precision for it to be very helpful in locating the trans-Neptunian planet.

Well, then what about Uranus? By 1900 it had been continuously observed for 1.4 of its revolutionary periods. Once Neptune's pull was taken into account, were there no discrepancies left in Uranus's orbital motion? If the trans-Neptunian planet existed it should have some effect on Uranus, though a much smaller one than Neptune's effect, since the trans-Neptunian planet would be considerably farther from Uranus than Neptune was.

And, as it happened, Neptune's pull only took care of about 59/60 of the discrepancy that had existed in the orbital calculations of Uranus. There still remained 1/60 unaccounted for and that must be due to a trans-Neptunian planet. But that was a very small quantity to work with.

There remained other objects existing in the outer regions of the Solar system and those were the comets. By the late 19th Century a number of comets were known whose orbits had been calculated. Some of them had aphelia (that is, farthest points from the sun) in the neighborhood of Jupiter's orbit. It was felt that Jupiter's gravitational pull had fixed the cometary orbits there and those comets were known as the "Jupiter family."

There were comets with aphelia well beyond Jupiter, which might conceivably have been affected by the farther planets. In particular, there were several comets (Halley's Comet among them) with aphelia well beyond Neptune's orbit; might they not have been captured by a trans-Neptunian planet?

These were not promising lines of attack — the very small orbital discrepancies of Uranus, the very vague orbital discrepancies of Neptune, and the very uncertain testimony of cometary aphelia — but they would have to do. By about 1900 astronomers were beginning to offer speculations as to the possible orbit of a trans-Neptunian planet.

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The gravitational effect of such a planet on Uranus and Neptune would fit best if the source were imagined as moving about the Sun with a particular velocity. Such a velocity would automatically fix the distance of the planet from the Sun. With the distance known, the mass of the planet required to produce its effect on Uranus and Neptune could be calculated. Then, if no circular orbit would fit the facts, the orbit might be imagined as distinctly elliptical and with an orbital plane tipped by a certain amount, so that the distance of the planet from Uranus and Neptune differed considerably from one end of its orbit to the other.

The data which astronomers had to begin with was so small, vague, or uncertain, that widely different solutions were almost equally possible. One astronomer suggested that the trans-Neptunian planet was more massive than Jupiter and was at a distance of 15,000 million kilometers or over three times the distance of Neptune from the Sun. Others suggested a smaller planet only 6,000 million kilometers from the Sun or less than one and a half times the distance of Neptune. Some suggested two or even three trans-Neptunian planets between the limits of 6,000 and 15,000 kilometers from the Sun.

The two most careful calculations, however, were those of Percival Lowell and William Henry Pickering. Both astronomers had been born in Boston, Lowell on March 13, 1855 (the 74th anniversary of the discovery of Uranus) and Pickering on February 15, 1858.

They were rivals in a way. Lowell was the great proponent of canals on Mars (see "The Olympian Snows," June 1975) but remained a minority figure among professional astronomers in this respect. Few other observers could see the canals (which were, it now appears, an optical illusion) except occasionally and uncertainly, and absolutely none could see them as clearly and in such detail as Lowell could.

Pickering was the leader of the anti-canal group. He was almost as assiduous as Lowell in his study of Mars, and though he reported straight markings, they were few and shifting and were not at all like those described by Lowell. (Pickering had foibles of his own, however. Based on his detailed studies of the Moon, he was sure that it supported life, and this was, if anything, more startling than canals on Mars.)

Now, in the first decade of the 20th Century, the two Bostonians entered a new field of rivalry, for each sought for the trans-Neptunian planet. Lowell, doing his best to account for the anomalies in the orbits of Uranus and Neptune, engaged in enormous calculations and ended up with a trans-Neptunian planet that had an orbit that was quite tilted and

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quite elliptical. He estimated that its distance from the Sun varied from 5,100 million kilometers at perihelion to 7,700 million kilometers at aphelion. Pickering's orbit obtained by less computation and more intuition was distinctly farther from the Sun than Lowell's was.

Given the orbits, each man could predict the approximate position of the trans-Neptunian planet at some particular time. In theory, one need only comb the sky in the indicated area and come up with the planet — but it wasn't that easy.

One could, in theory, look at every star in the region, record its position, and see if there was any record of that star on a star map. If there wasn't, it had wandered in from elsewhere and was a planet. That precise system had worked for Neptune, but for the new, much dimmer planet there were far too many stars to check. Even though 20th Century astronomers had photography with which to record the positions of stars for study at leisure, which the Neptune-discoverers of 1846, didn't have, the method was not practical.

Lowell, working at Lowell Observatory, which he had built in the clear desert air of Flagstaff, Arizona, used another method. He took a photograph of a portion of the sky in the region where the planet might be, then another photograph of the same region three days later. In three days, even the slow motion of a trans-Neptunian planet would have produced a noticeable shift in position.

Then, taking the pairs of pictures, he would compare the many stars of one to the many of the other in a slow and painstaking effort to see if one had changed its position. He did this over and over again for something like eleven years, bending over his plates endlessly, poring at them through a magnifying glass, studying the tiny dots, and comparing them.

Over and over he would find a shift. Each time his heart would leap, but each time the shift was too great and it was an asteriod. As more and more observations were made of Neptune and as its orbital discrepancies became better known, Lowell would recalculate his trans-Neptunian orbit and shift somewhat the focus of his most intense efforts. When he had to be away from the lab, his assistants carried on the search while he wrote to them constantly for news and went over all their plates when he returned, double-checking.*

He wore himself out, losing weight and equanimity and died of a stroke

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**There is no question in my mind that if he were asked what he would do if he knew he had only six months to live, he would have answered, "Look harder!"*

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on November 12, 1916 at the comparatively young age of 61.

Pickering's efforts were not nearly as intense as Lowell's, but they reached a climax in the years following Lowell's death. At Mount Wilson Observatory in California, a young astronomer, Milton La Salle Humason, using Pickering's figures, began to search for the trans-Neptunian planet by the same system Lowell had used.

Humason did not succeed either, but he did not carry on too long. Lowell's long failure had taken the heart out of the search for most people, and, after awhile, Humason decided that the planet wasn't there and the devil with it. In later years, looking back on the plates he had taken with the benefit of hindsight, it turned out he had photographed the trans-Neptunian planet twice. One time, a nearby star, brighter than the planet, had drowned it out. The second time, its image had just happened to fall on a tiny flaw in the plate.

Heartbreaking, but they don't pay off on heartbreak.

One person who did not give up was Percival Lowell. Dead he might be, but his money was not. He had left a trust fund for use in the search for the trans-Neptunian planet, and a decade after his death, his brother Abbott Lawrence Lowell* added additional money to the fund.

By 1929, this money had made it possible to add a new telescope to the equipment at Lowell Observatory, one that had a very wide field and could photograph sharply all the stars over a considerably larger area of the sky than had been possible before. Using an exposure of one hour, stars down to the 17th magnitude could be recorded and the trans-Neptunian planet, if it existed, was sure to be bright enough, and to spare, for detection.

Also added was a young astronomer named Clyde William Tombaugh. Tombaugh had been born in Streator, Illinois, on February 4, 1906, and his family was too poor to send him to college. He was sufficiently interested in astronomy, however, to build a telescope with a 9-inch lens making use of parts of old machinery available on his father's farm. With his home-made telescope, he observed Mars carefully, saw the canals, and sent a report on his experience in building the telescope and on his observations therewith to Vesto Melvin Slipher, who was then director of Lowell Observatory. Tombaugh rightly felt the observatory would be interested in anything to do with the canals. Slipher was impressed enough

**Abbott was President of Harvard University for a quarter of a century. Percival Lowell's sister was the poet Amy Lowell; his grand-uncle was the poet James Russell Lowell.*

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to offer the young man a job and Tombaugh accepted it.

Tombaugh, still in his early twenties, young, vigorous, and full of enthusiasm, tackled the task that had so preoccupied Lowell and continued the search for the trans-Neptunian planet. He began to take photographs of the star-fields in Aries, Taurus, and Gemini, the area where Lowell's calculations had indicated the planet might be. Many thousands of stars were on each plate.

The task would have continued to be a virtually impossible one except for still another technical advance. Tombaugh had a "blink comparator" which Lowell had not had.

The blink comparator could project light through one plate taken on a certain day and then through the other plate taken a few days later, and do so in rapid alternation. The plates were adjusted so that the stars on each were focused on the same position relative to each other and would produce precisely the same projection. The rapid alternation would be so fast that the eye would not detect the flashing but would see a steady unchanging picture.

If, however, there was a planetary object present it would have moved between the times the two photographs were taken, and the effect of the blink comparator would be that of showing the planet in one position and then in a new position in rapid alternation. The planet would blink rapidly while all about it were motionless.

It was now not necessary to compare each one of the many thousands of stars on one plate with each one of the many thousands of stars on the other. It was only necessary to study every part of the plate in order to catch sight of that tiny blinking alternation, and make sure the motion was too small for it to be the result of an asteroid.

Tombaugh began the search in the fall of 1929 and by February 1930 was working through the boundary region between Taurus and Gemini. Here the stars were particularly densely-strewn and he found himself struggling with single plates that contained as many as 400,000 stars. He was having a miserable time, and quite arbitrarily, just to give himself a rest, he switched to the other end of Gemini where the stars were sparser and his plates carried only 50,000 of them.

Then, at 4 P.M. on February 18, he spotted the blink. It was a 15th magnitude object and the shift was a small one of 3½ millimeters. It could not be an asteroid. It had to be the trans-Neptunian planet. He looked for earlier photographs of the region to see if he could spot a "star" that

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seemed to have been moving progressively. Knowing where to look, he had no trouble finding it.

From day to day he observed that object, and each day's motion proved more conclusively that it was what he had been looking for. The discovery of the ninth planet was formally announced on March 13, 1930, which was the 149th anniversary of the discovery of Uranus and the 75th anniversary of the birth of Percival Lowell.

There were some suggestions that the new planet be named Lowell, but that was not seriously considered. A mythological name was needed and Pluto was adopted for the purpose.

It was an appropriate name, for the new planet, farther from the Sun than any other, was far enough out in the darkness of space to be named for the god of the dark underworld. In addition, the first two letters of the name were the initials of Percival Lowell, and don't think that those who proposed the name were unaware of that.

It is rather sad to think that if Percival Lowell had only lived to the thoroughly attainable age of 75, he would have witnessed the discovery. Pickering, who died in 1938, just a month short of his 80th birthday, did live to see it.

Yet in some ways, the discovery was pure luck. The orbit of Pluto was markedly different from the orbit that Lowell had calculated. Pluto's orbit was considerably more tilted and more ellipitical than Lowell had supposed. What's more, Pluto's orbit was considerably closer to the Sun than Lowell and supposed. At aphelion it was 7,400 million kilometers from the Sun, and at perihelion it was only 4,400 million kilometers from the Sun. At perihelion it was actually slightly closer to the Sun than Neptune ever gets. (However, such is the tilt of Pluto's orbit that even when it seems to cross Neptune's orbit in the usual drawings of the Solar system it does so 1,400 million kilometers away in the third dimension. Where Lowell had expected the trans-Neptunian planet to circle the Sun once in 282 years (and where Pickering's figure was 373 years), Pluto's actual revolutionary period was 248 years.

It was luck that Pluto was in a part of its orbit which was comparatively close to Lowell's calculated position. If it had been in other parts of its orbit, it would have been so far from the point of calculation that the kind of search carried through by Lowell, Humason, and Tombaugh would not have succeeded.

The discrepancy in orbit could be dismissed, however, considering the

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uncertainty of the data with which Lowell had had to work. What was much more imporatnt was that Pluto was so *dim*. It was at least two magnitudes dimmer than it had been expected to be, and it would not show a disc. Both facts could only be explained by supposing it to be considerably smaller than any of the other outer planets. It was not only far smaller than the large giants Jupiter and Saturn. It was far smaller than the medium giants Uranus and Neptune.

In fact the more closely it was studied, the smaller it seemed to be. For a while, it was thought to be no more massive than Earth but in recent years, better data seemed to make it no more massive than Mars, or only 1/10 as massive as the Earth.

In early 1976, spectroscopic analyses of its light have confirmed what had previously been supposed — that the planet is far enough from the Sun, and therefore cold enough, to have frozen methane coating its surface. But methane is frozen only at temperatures lower than 89° Absolute. For a planetary surface temperature to remain that low, the planet must not only be far from the Sun, it must be small enough not to have developed much internal heat. Some astronomers now wonder if Pluto's mass might be no more than that of the Moon, or only 1/80 the mass of the Earth.

Whatever the actual mass, it is quite certain that Pluto is far too small to have captured any comets, or to have any significant effect on the orbital movements of Uranus or Neptune. All the orbital discrepancies used to calculate the position of the trans-Neptunian planet have nothing to do with Pluto. Pluto's discovery is just an accidental fringe benefit of the search for the trans-Neptunian planet, like Columbus's discovery of America when he was heading for Asia.

But that means the trans-Neptunian planet (or trans-Plutonian planet, as it must now be called) which accounts for the orbital discrepancies must still exist and be out there somewhere. It is probably more distant than Pluto and must certainly be far more massive. Perhaps the size is great enough to make up for the greater distance so that it may not be much, if any, dimmer than Pluto and can be detected with no greater trouble — but I have the feeling no one is looking.

Well, we can wait. Neptune was discovered 65 years after Uranus was, and Pluto was discovered 84 years after Neptune was. If we allow a reasonable 100-year gap for the trans-Plutonian planet that takes us to 2030.

By then, assuming civilization survives, we ought to have a large

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telescope in orbit, or on the Moon, which can make observations without an interfering atmosphere. Furthermore, advanced computerization will probably allow the telescope to search for the blink without human interference, and it would, in a matter of months, do what would have taken astronomers with the equipment of Tombaugh centuries, perhaps.

And then the trans-Plutonian planet can be found.

In fact, when the time comes that we can set up astronomical stations in the outer Solar system, we may find several trans-Plutonian planets, and the Solar system will assume the vast size it must have in reality.

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Stephen Tall has established himself as a superior storyteller with the Stardust *stories and most recently with "Chlorophyll," June 1976. In this fresh and suspenseful tale about the day-before-doomsday, he proves again that, in the right hands, there is such things as an overused sf theme.*

The Man Who Saved The Sun

by STEPHEN TALL

Jason MacKinney awakened. The yellow sunlight filtered through the curtains of his bedroom window. He lay lazily and watched the flickering light patterns on his walls.

To Jason, life was good. When a man is twenty-three, healthy, has a job he likes, a girl who likes him, and a long weekend ahead — what else is there? To Jason, at least, nothing else had importance.

The mellow light shifted about as a brief breeze stirred the shrubbery outside the window. The pale rays were thin and diluted, as always when the morning was young and when they had been sieved by leaves and by the window curtains.

The radio on his bed table clicked on and began to hum. It was set to awaken him, and he reached out his arm to shut it off. Then the announcer's voice broke through:

"—but Professor Goodwin is standing firm. He insists that instruments don't lie and that figures don't lie. He adds that he doesn't need the publicity and doesn't welcome it, but that somebody should alert the world. This, the professor insists, is serious. Here is the complete text of the professor's announcement, as read by him late last night."

The radio buzzed gently for a moment; then a different voice, soft, almost hesitant, began to speak.

"To the citizens of the world, the people of the planet Earth. This is an announcement I do not expect you to believe. It is not going to be pleasant to read in the news that Anthony Goodwin — Nobel laureate in astronomy, discoverer of the Goodwin Reversal Sequence, longtime student of solar composition and energy production, and professor emeritus at CalTech — has

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finally gone off his rocker. There will doubtless be more apt and picturesque phrases. I am not a student of colloquial English."

The gentle voice paused. For all its lack of emphasis, there was in it a grim seriousness that caught the ear.

"In brief, ladies and gentlemen, this is the message. *The sun has become unstable.*

"I am quite aware that is meaningless to most who have listened to this point. It is something ridiculous, something unheard of, something that does not even make good nonsense. It cannot possibly affect or be of concern to you. Unfortunately, it can and it is.

"The sun is a star. Stars are not immutable, unchanging objects in space. They are created out of spatial matter; they go through a long and complex series of progressive and then retrogressive changes, and finally they die. The character of a star, and to some extent its age, is indicated by the amounts, kinds and qualities of the energies that it releases and radiates.

"The stars that we see, we know because they emit visible light. With appropriate instruments, many other types of radiation can be detected and demonstrated. These things most reading people know.

"But the sun, to us, is a special star. It's our life. From its radiations, in the forms mainly of light and heat, we get the energy by which we live. In terms of these energies we, the life on this planet, have evolved. With any conspicuous change in the nature of the sun, we die."

The professor halted again. The microphone picked up his slow breathing and the rustle of the papers in his hands.

"These are not the words I would use, not the words that I have used in communicating with colleagues all over the world. They know these things. And with the complex items of equipment which are their research tools they can readily verify my observations. Undoubtedly they have done so. But they cannot face what all their data plainly show. On this earth no astronomer, no nuclear physicist, no student of energies, will admit the simple fact with which I began this statement. The sun has begun to deteriorate rapidly.

"It is not possible to predict the exact mechanisms of the breakdown. We do not have the experience. We do not have the data. The heat and other radiations may intensify, day by day, week by week, month by month, until they become intolerable to life as we know it. For us that will be the end.

"But there are alternatives. The sun could explode. The energy-

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releasing reactions could all be implemented at once. In this case our problems will be minimal. We, the planet we live on, the entire system of which it is a part, will be snuffed out in a breath, in a whisper, in an explosion that perhaps will make no sound, for there will be no one to hear. The sun will become what the astronomer calls a nova, a brief brilliant flare among the stars, as all the energy that we hoped would be rationed out over a billion years is released at once. We will become a Star of Bethlehem."

The radio hummed for half a minute. Then the soft old voice resumed.

"This statement is not being made to cause panic. I am sure that it won't, for no one will believe — yet. But in these, the latter years of my life, I have acquired certain convictions. I feel that wherever it is possible for man to be aware, he should be aware. I feel that man should not go unknowing to his own doom.

"There will, I think, be a certain interest in events as they develop. Those who have training and competence will have an unparalleled opportunity to study the breakdown of a star. Those who are concerned with remedy can gather enough information to hypothesize the steps that might be taken to halt the headlong breakdown of our energy source. They may theorize on how the sun could be saved.

"These will only be thoughts, ideas, hypothetical solutions. The sun is ninety-three millions of miles away. There will be nothing that can be done. But this is not new to the theoretical scientist. He rarely can utilize directly what he learns. But for a brief time man may conceivably know how, with the proper opportunity, he might have saved the sun."

Again the long pause, the rustling papers. Then the professor concluded as he had begun, gently, almost hesitantly.

"This is what I felt that I must say to the world. I am resigned to all the unpleasant commentary that will come for a while — until the heat and hard radiation become noticeably intensified. Then I hope for the objectivity which will, after all, be the only possible way to face what, without the intervention of a miracle, is sure to come. And, as a contemplative student of the physical universe, I must confess that I do not believe in miracles. Unexplained phenomena, yes. They are abundant. But miracles, alas, no.

"The human race has not always lived with dignity. In fact, it usually has not. So this is, in a sense, an opportunity. All things end. So far as we have been able to learn, we are the most advanced beings the universe has produced. Perhaps the only ones. It has been

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an experience. If it ends, it ends. Let us be objective, curious, interested to the last. Whether we are the end results of random progression and development or whether there was a reason for us, science does not presume to conclude. Others may. It is their privilege.

"Thank you, fellow humans, and good evening."

The radio changed to a different hum as the transcription ended.

"This station will not comment further on Professor Goodwin's, to put it mildly, unusual statement. We will report the news. If and when there are further developments, you will hear them here. And now a message..." Jason's fingers flipped the switch.

The sunlight on the walls was stronger, and Jason regarded it approvingly as he rolled out of bed.

"Looks all right to me," he said. "In spite of the old boy, we may have a few more days. I'd at least like to go out with a good sun tan."

This he set himself to do. He called Sally, who, he felt complacently sure, had been waiting for the call.

"Did you hear the radio news? According to some old stargazer, the sun is quitting on us. We better be out and about and enjoying it while we can. How about the beach?"

"I heard Professor Goodwin." Sally Rand's light voice sounded glad enough at the prospect, but she sounded reproving, too. "He isn't some old stargazer. He's just about the most famous astronomer in the world, that's all. He's not putting us on. And by us I mean we, the people. I think he really knows something. I think people ought not to laugh."

"Well, you're his number-one convert, as far as I know. Maybe a few others will join you later. Your astronomy is just about equal to mine, looking up at the Milky Way on nice nights with the convertible top down. With what you know and what the professor knows, it adds up to what the professor knows."

"I guess so." The girl's pleasant tones were serious. "It's mighty hard to do anything but make fun of him. Pitiful, my mom said. But he didn't sound pitiful to me. He sounded like a prophet. He sounded like a man who knew."

"He knew for a lot of years," Jason admitted. "After all, I know who the guy is. But after listening to that stuff he's just put out, you know he's over the hill. It isn't the sun that's deteriorating. It's Professor Goodwin."

"Well, even he admits that it won't happen today," Sally conceded. "Pick me up at ten. I'll bring a lunch. We can get some beer at Sammy's when we go by."

At the beach the sun still

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seemed to be in good form. Jason lounged on his blanket under the big umbrella that was always a part of the equipment of his convertible in summer. He watched with complete approval as Sally's neat figure came plowing out of the surf. She ran across the beach toward him. With only the tiny string bikini, she seemed to be wearing nothing at all. The result was slightly spectacular.

"Lazy!" she jeered at Jason. She shook a shower of drops from her curly brown hair. "That old umbrella isn't going to help if the sun really does go haywire. Why don't you come on out? You're no fun lying there like a piece of driftwood."

Jason put his hands behind his head and studied her with appreciation.

"I've had a hard week," he said tranquilly. "My batteries are recharging. Would you mind just dripping for a couple of minutes? You'll get the blanket soggy."

She threatened him with a handful of sand.

"I wouldn't if I were you. The beach is covered with sand, and I might have to use a great deal of it in those wet curls and across that sunburned back...but, you know," he added, "your parents must have known something when they named you Sally. Sally Rand! It evokes memories, though more from my grandpop than from me."

Sally picked up a towel and began to dry the threatened curls.

"It's a bad joke," she said. "Fortunately, not too many remember the original Sally. It's like all the families named Washington who think it's cute to name their little boys George. I actually remember reading recently where a Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln had named an inoffensive baby Abraham. That's dirty pool."

Jason's eyes dwelt with deep content on the collection of curves, curls and dimples wielding the towel. "Sally Rand! Be a shame to change it. But if you really feel strongly about it, how about Sally MacKinney? Has a nice ring, don't you think?"

She grinned at him.

"You've mentioned that before. I've got it under advisement and contemplation. Maybe when the sun really does start to act up ... Sally Rand isn't quite that intolerable — yet."

"In that case," Jason reached into the cooler sitting at the edge of the umbrella's shade, "how about a beer? Looks like I may have a while to wait."

But the wait was not as long as Jason had implied. His implication was never. It took scarcely more than a month.

But even then there was no

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great cause for alarm. It was just that the sunspots began to misbehave. Late-summer weather all over the earth was not quite as usual, with rains and winds where none were expected. Meteorologists were puzzled. An enterprising newsman in Omaha wrote a weather story and, on inspiration, consulted and quoted Professor Goodwin.

The press had been kind to the professor after his strange broadcast. The jeers and sarcasm, the burlesque stories and columns, the ponderous editorials, had for the most part passed him by. He had had a distinguished, an impressive career. By failing to scorn or even to recognize his warning, the media in effect were saying that senility was no crime and might come to anyone. It was remarkable restraint by a category of world citizens not famous for restraint.

But the Omaha story brought the professor back to the attention of the common man, the man to whom weather was important. The businesslike report was headed bluntly:

"PROFESSOR GOODWIN
EXPLAINS.
SUNSPOTS, HE SAYS

"The cornfields of Iowa and Nebraska are crisping and drying up in the hottest winds the Middle West has ever recorded. The snow peaks of the Sierras and the Rockies are losing their snowfields. Valley glaciers are shrinking. The Colorado River is in flood as it usually is in spring. There is rain where none is expected, none where they always has been rain.

"The jungles of Gabon are being lashed by storm after storm. In the northern Sahara the sands are absorbing floods of rain such as have not fallen in recorded history. Yet the Ganges is little more than a wide muddy valley with little trickles of water coming down from the many sources that supply it. Antarctica has recorded its highest temperatures ever.

"'Unusual,' we are told, 'but all within normal limits. It's a rough summer, a different summer, but the weather will adjust. It always has.' This is our summary of what we have learned in a canvass of weathermen across this country. To us, that isn't enough. It isn't what our readers want to hear. It doesn't satisfy. We get the uneasy feeling of hidden things, of people holding their breath, of people afraid.

"So we called a man who, a month ago, made an announcement that everyone felt was absurd. We express here our appreciation of his accepting the call and of his consenting to give us a statement. Professor Anthony Goodwin answered our questions simply, with confidence and without hesitation. No matter how we may have felt a month ago, today we were impres-

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sed. Just as we recorded it, we here transcribe the professor's statement:

"'As any astronomer could tell you, but may not, the weather changes are directly due to changes in the rate of radiation of energy from the sun. They could also tell you, but probably will not, that the patterns and cycles of sunspots, always more or less dependable and predictable, have gone completely awry. They could tell you that practically all known spots are shrinking in size and that some apparently have vanished.

"'Sunspots may be simply described as great whirlpools in the gaseous outer layer of the sun. They are relatively cool spots, for in them certain atomic changes are going on which absorb energy, rather than release it. They are, in effect, heat-regulating areas, areas which, some of us believe, at least assist in stabilizing the temperatures of the sun and the amounts and natures of the radiations from it.

"'This, you will understand, is oversimplification. The energy changes, productions and utilizations that go on within a star are complex beyond belief. Even the little that we know would not help your story at all. But we can say simply that the diminishing of the sunspots means that the temperatures on the surface of the sun are increasing. All types of radiation striking the earth are becoming more intense. The Van Allen belts are being breached more and more. Various types of hard radiation are amplifying. Or perhaps we might say that the solar wind is blowing steadily harder.'

"We asked the professor one more question. We record it here not to alarm, but to inform. For, as he says, there is no reason for alarm. When the earth is in danger, we are in danger. But there is nowhere we can go. There is nothing we can do. Our question: 'Professor Goodwin, are you saying that the earth is actually in danger of being destroyed?' We transcribe his answer:

"'I made a statement to the world a month ago. Then, the facts I presented could be detected and verified only by delicate instrumentation. Now, there has been progression. Now, anyone can see that the sun is abnormal. Now, the first effects of a sun destroying itself are being seen and felt on earth. Now the population of a world must begin to decide whether or not it will die with maturity and dignity, or with the frantic behavior of trapped beasts. Young man, I am not like the wild-eyed, bearded cartoon caricature carrying a placard reading THE END OF THE WORLD IS AT HAND!

"'But it is.'"

This time Professor Goodwin

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could not escape the concentrated attentions of the media. But they were cautious attentions, sober attentions, attentions almost reflecting awe. And finally the worlds of astronomy and of nuclear physics were forced to surface and to commit themselves. Yes, they admitted, there was nothing wrong with Professor Goodwin's data. It was simply that his interpretations and predictions were unduly extreme. The sun had been stable for billions of years. There were no reasons, no indications that it would lose that stability now. True, the sun was in a period of increased radiation. True, the weather disruptions were certainly mostly caused by the turmoil in the sun. But there was plenty of evidence that similar changes had happened many times before. It was even true that the world economy would probably be badly affected by the weather crisis. But, the great observatories of the world said soothingly, the sun would survive.

They spoke to each other across the empty spaces. As distances, the spaces were not great. They were only the distances between satellite and satellite, between the planets that followed their measured trails around the yellow star. They knew what distances really were, these entities that sat, one on each planet, and watched over it and made careful note of every change in the central sun.

"There is no doubt about it now."

The being that monitored Mercury transmitted to the only entity that it could reach, the cloudy watcher on Venus.

"It will make swift difference to the life here," Venus messaged. "It is not structured to abide the increased neutron rain. At this short distance the concentration will quickly be too great."

Earth heard. Venus could communicate outward to that next station, as well as inward to Mercury. Generally they conferred as a group of three, though Mercury could not detect Earth, nor Earth Mercury. But Venus sat between them.

And so Earth sat between Venus and Mars and could hear them both. Mars could reach out to the being who monitored Jupiter, who in turn could contact Saturn. And so on out to the contented watcher on Pluto, who communicated only with Neptune but otherwise sat and contemplated the Void, the space between suns.

It was this being who finally spoke what all knew. Its communication was passed along, until all had heard its thought.

"This is a progressive thing. It will not stop. It does not matter what effect it has on the life you

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observe, for when it reaches the critical point, there will be no life anyway. There will be no system. We will have to move to another sun, take up other watching tasks."

"The Leader will have to assign them," Neptune said.

"It does not know," Earth pointed out. "It is asleep, as It wished to be. It is enjoying the small view, the life view. It has shut out perspective."

"It will know," Mercury said, "when the change comes. The life view will be gone. It will resume perspective."

"This is a normal thing," Jupiter said. "We have seen it before. It happens all the time."

"I think," Earth said, "that this is what the Leader meant by emergency. I think It would want to be awakened. It has a special concern for the life in this system."

"And especially," said Mars, "for the life on your world."

"That is true," Earth admitted. "Here the life has many forms. They are its favorites."

The communications halted then. The Earth moved one twelfth of its revolution around the primary, the source of the energy that maintained life in the system. In that timespan the upheavals in the gases of the primary intensified. Great swirling storms lashed and raged all over its surface. Terrible lancing jets of energy flashed into space for millions of miles. Glowing gouts of matter tore from the mass and were flung far out, to fall back into the maelstroms of gases and disappear. From the satellites the light of the primary changed from the clear yellow that it had always been to a deep sullen orange.

Horrid waves of radiation bathed the sunside of Mercury. Pulsing hordes of electrons thinned and began to break down the buffering clouds of carbon dioxide that hid the surface of Venus, and the battering neutrons sickened the planet's life.

"We should awaken the Leader now," Venus messaged. "At least It should be aware."

"My satellite has become radioactive," Mercury said. "Also, it is beginning to vaporize."

"Earth's ozone layer is being penetrated more and more," Earth communicated. "The shield is breaking down. Soon much of the life will begin to die, and what remains will be changed beyond belief."

"Does it matter?" Mars inquired. "When the disintegration point is reached, everything will go together. We have experienced it before. Life, satellites, the entire system, all will be spread deep into the Void that Pluto loves to contemplate. Eventually it will reassemble. Time has no beginning and no end. Does it matter?"

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"Probably not," Jupiter agreed. "Still, we were given the instruction about emergency. Our function is to observe the system. If it no longer exists, that would be too late for emergency. I say an emergency exists now. The Leader should be awakened. Further decision is beyond our instruction."

"I agree," Saturn said. "Awaken It!"

"Awaken It!" Uranus said. "I like this post. I haven't had one so satisfying for cosmic eons. I would hate to lose it."

"You will lose it," Neptune pointed out. "The Leader will only be aware of what is happening. It will not interfere. I doubt that It can. This is a normal occurrence. But awaken It. It should know."

"A small thing," Pluto said, "but it differs from the big things only in size. Importance is what It determines to be important. It is not within our scope to judge. Awaken It!"

And "Awaken It! — Awaken It! Awaken It!" pulsed from watcher to watcher.

"We are nine," Mercury summarized, "and each has projected the same thought. We have understood alike. We are agreed. Awaken It!"

"Very well," said Earth.

"Sally," Jason MacKinney said, "are you as lonesome as I am?" He sat on the side of his bed, and the hand that held the phone was not steady.

"I'm pretty lonely." The light voice had lost its lilt. It was high and strained. "Jason, have you seen the sun?"

"I've seen," Jason said. "So far, kid, the professor's batting a thousand. I think that the days at the beach are over."

He could hear her breathing, softly, and with little catches and breaks. He knew she was crying.

"Let's go anyway," she said finally. "We planned to. We don't have to get out of the car. We can sit on the bluff above the sand and watch the waves roll in. We can talk. Jason, if I can't talk to you I'll go mad."

"I'll pick you up. The bluff will be as good as anywhere. Somehow, I don't think it will make any difference where we go. Like the professor said, we can't get away from it."

For that was the day the sun began to grow orange. It was also the day the first man leaped to his death from the Golden Gate Bridge. And across the continent an elderly couple climbed to the top of the high framing of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge at Baltimore, solemnly kissed each other while a breathless crowd watched, then, holding hands, plunged into the orange-tinted waters far below.

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"How could it have happened so fast?"

Sally seemed calm now. Only her small nervous fingers, clinging to his, told Jason how close she was to panic and collapse.

They sat in the convertible, parked on a height where they had often sat before. The Pacific came rolling in as it always had, but with a violence usually seen only after coastwise storms, and every wave seemed crested with blood.

"The professor says that it's a building thing. The sun is feeding on itself. The hotter it gets, the faster it moves toward extinction, toward explosion. Seems sort of like a movie, doesn't it? A suspense-filled drama, earth-shaking, unbelievable. *Earthquake. The Towering Inferno.* Kid stuff. We've got parts in the biggest pulse-quickener in the history of the business. But we'll never know how it would have played in Peoria."

The girl looked at him, and made no move to get closer. Just the clinging fingers seemed to be enough.

"I should have married you, Jason, months ago, a year ago, when you first wanted me to." She seemed quieter now. The calmness she had been pretending was becoming real. The fingers had a firmer pressure. A quiet resignation seemed to flow through them. "I intended to. You know that, don't you, Jason? It's just that there was plenty of time. We were having fun. There wasn't any hurry. Even you weren't rushing me. You knew how I felt. —And now it's too late, isn't it? We won't have a life together. It wasn't ever meant to be."

He leaned back in his seat, a slender, lithe young man with a thin face deeply tanned in the better days of the anguished sun. He gave the hand in his a comforting little squeeze. He even smiled.

"That's the thing I would have wanted most, if the earth had lived," Jason said. "You heard the professor's broadcast last night, didn't you?"

Sally shook her head.

"I don't listen to newscasts any more. They all sound so horrible, pretending everything is going to be all right. And all the time you can tell that even the announcers are ready to scream."

"Not the professor. I've got a thing about that old boy. He's civilized. He made a little broadcast yesterday and suggested that everyone decide what he would have done next, what he would have liked to have done, if it had been possible before the world died. He urged everybody to think hard. Said it was better than giving way. Said it was the dignified way to go. The old boy's big on dignity, and who's to say he isn't right? Just a look at that *thing* up there, and we know

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we're going. Why go kicking and screaming?"

"And what would he have done, if he'd had his opportunity?" Even in this last extremity Sally sounded a little scornful. Jason felt a pulse of pleasure. She was a terrified, bewildered girl, but she was one of the strong ones of the world, just the same, one of the ones the professor had been talking to. She hadn't panicked. She wouldn't now.

"As a matter of fact, he told what he would have liked to do. They played his statement last night. I taped it. I thought we might want to hear it together."

Jason slid a small cassette into the tape deck on the car's dashboard and flipped the switch. The speaker purred, and then Professor Goodwin's gentle voice came out, caught in midsentence. "I didn't think of it in time to tape it all," said Jason.

"—so my regrets are fewer than those of many of you who are younger. I have had a long, good life. I have had a chance to accomplish some satisfying things. You, my fellow men, have given me recognition for them. But," and here the old man's voice became almost whimsical, "there is one last experiment I would have liked to see tried. Unfortunaely, there is no way that it could have been done. But it would have been magnificent!

"You see, people of the world, I believe that there is a way that the sun could have been saved. My last hypothesis! The sun is dying because it is no longer cycling energy within itself, no longer releasing and retrapping most of what it releases. It is radiating faster and faster. It is using up its capital. It has somehow lost the balance that has kept it glowing there over the millenniums, over the billions of years. How, why, I do not know.

"But I have thought that this sick sun could have been given a pill, a tiny antidote for its imbalance. I have hypothesized that if more mass could have been added to it, ideally composed of the heavier elements, iron and mercury and uranium and lead and their elemental brothers, big, ponderous atoms that would require much energy to tear down, that perhaps it might serve to check the breakdown, to damp the radiation, even to re-establish the cycle. It wouldn't have required much. Maybe only a few hundreds of millions of tons would have done the job. After all, how much of a catalyst is required in a chemical reaction?"

There was a pause, the characteristic Goodwin pause, with the shuffling of papers. And there was almost a chuckle in the quiet voice when he resumed:

"I know. Many of you listening make no sense at all of what I am

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saying. Perhaps great scientists, if any hear me, will not make much more. But, remember, this is my last scientific guess. My last venture into hypothesis. It couldn't be tested, couldn't be tried out if I still had a thousand years. And some of you have had dreams, too, that couldn't ever come true. But you had them just the same.

"This is the twilight of the human race, friends. In a little while its home will not even be a memory, for there will be no one, no sentient thing, to remember. Still, it will be a satisfaction to meet it with dignity. This is my last word to you. I am sorry that it had to be the voice of doom. Good night."

The cassette tape whirred, and Jason shut off the switch. Sally's fingers pressed his gently. When finally he looked at her she was smiling.

"He's really great, isn't he?"

"He's really great," Jason agreed. "What a shame he couldn't try it."

He gazed out across the roiling, blood-tipped waves. Slowly he leaned back in his seat, and his brown eyes seemed to expand, to grow wide and terrible. With one swift finger he touched the girl's forehead. She sank back gently, the blue eyes closed, and she slept.

Out of the still body that was Jason MacKinney energy rolled in patterned waves, and around and over it slowly formed a mighty figure, completely diaphanous to human eyes. It expanded, spread, until the mountains in the distance behind it towered no higher, and it seemed to pick up a strange radiance from the rays of the sick sun.

"I hear," it communicated. "I am awake. I see the reason for the call. I agree. It is emergency."

"We were of one mind," said the watcher from Earth.

"It was in accordance with my instructions. We will gather, all, on the shining satellite, the one called Venus. Communication will not be enough. We must all be present physically, in body. Then I will instruct."

(Author's note: These are meanings that we present here. It must not be thought that they were spoken, nor that they in any way had this form. But this is the substance of their intercourse, the sharing of fact and idea. They understood. It is presented in this fashion so that you also may understand.)

The time lapse was little more than a pulse, but they were all present, huge, incredible, glowing, swathing the high hills of Venus with their eerie radiance, thrusting out of the planet's cloud blanket into the shimmering emptiness of space.

"For the first time in my

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existence," the Leader said, "I cannot watch a happening without regret. Yet I have seen many stars die."

"It was a good system in which to watch," Mercury said. "I have found pleasure in it."

"You have been closest to the star. Why has it lost its balance? What changes have you seen?"

"You do not wish an answer to that, though you have a reason for asking it. You know the answer. We live by the energy of the radiating bodies of the galaxy, but we have never known what goes on within them. We do not know how or why a star dies. There is no fashion that this information can be obtained. We simply watch."

"Yet we are the only life, the only race not bound to a single star. We move as we will through our assigned sector of the galaxy. We are in size comparable to the space we can occupy. We watch, as only we can do it. We should know more. Why don't we?"

"As Mercury has said, you do not wish to answer." Jupiter communicated in a fashion that indicated amusement. "You have information you intend to share with us. Perhaps you should do this. Otherwise, what any of us knows, we all know. No purpose is served by repeating any of it."

"I am establishing limits," the Leader said. "We have certainly felt that no life in the galaxy is our equal. We have watched the crawling beings on satellites of many suns, and none could understand as we understand. We have thought of ourselves as the superior life. Yet, because of our very size, and the special nature of our needs, there are many things that we do not know. If a sun dies, we move to one that is not dead. We do not need to know why the sun explodes, or radiates itself into a dark mass with no energy."

"We know what we need to know," Neptune said. "It is not necessary to know what we could not change. Still, I would have liked it if this star had continued to live. I have never had a post that pleased me as well."

"I have been asleep for twenty-three revolutions of Earth around the sun," the Leader said. "As all know, this life has long been my greatest interest. By joining it, by becoming one of the beings, I have learned many things. And the greatest of the things I have learned is that they know more than we."

"They are very small," Venus observed. "They can exist only on their planet. When the star explodes, they will die. Their wisdom will not save them."

"But *they know* what goes on within the star. They know that it is going to die. And they know why. This tiny race of beings, with its

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limited scope, has watched much more closely than we, whose lives are spent watching."

"They will still die," Pluto said.

"This is why I have summoned you here. They have a way of learning that they call hypothesis and experiment. They sense a problem, decide what the answer may be, then actually move things about to see if their answer is correct. It is something we have never done."

"It was never our function." Saturn's communication, in human terms, might almost have been thought to contain outrage, certainly disapproval. "What happens, happens. We only watch."

"If we were confined to a planet and our life source was dying, would you change that if you could?"

"It is a pointless thought," Saturn said. "It could not happen to us."

"It is the situation of the beings on Earth. And one of the wisest has proposed an experiment. He has said that if mass could be added to the sun, more matter, it might rebalance itself."

"Still a pointless thought. He could not possibly do it."

"That is true. But *we* could. We were not wise enough to think of a way to save the sun, but we can do the professor's experiment."

"Never," said Mars, "never since the first watcher have we tried to interfere with or to change. Should we?"

"Is there a reason why we should not? When the star explodes, this system will be detroyed. I would like to do the experiment. It will be a new way of watching."

"Do we need a new way of watching?" Saturn asked. "We have watched as we do now for countless ages. It has been enough."

"Here is a small, helpless race of beings, planet-bound. Yet its thoughts are large. It would interest me to see it save itself with its own thoughts. I would finish my sleep among them, if the experiment succeeded. I would have perhaps sixty more revolutions of Earth around the sun. It is the most pleasant watching I have ever done."

"You are the Leader," Uranus said. "Command us. We must obey."

"In this," the Leader communicated, "I will not command. You must wish to help. I will not force my thoughts upon you."

"The star is large," Mercury said. "What mass would you use? It would require a great deal."

"There is enough, and it is convenient." Had the Leader been human, It would have smiled. "But you will lose your watching location. If we can displace your

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satellite, cause it to go more and more slowly in its revolution, it will fall into its primary. Its speed keeps it in orbit, as you know."

"I like the thought," Jupiter said. "Could we do it? It would require a great force."

"We are adapted to absorb and store energy in great quantities; otherwise we could not travel from energy-source to energy-source. We will gather the sun's own radiations and use them to save it. We can do it. But it will require all of us."

"It is the first new thought we have had in millenniums," said Neptune. "Saturn will be reluctant, but I think we will all help."

"I do not object to new thoughts," Saturn said defensively. "The system is doomed anyway. We cannot possibly injure it. I will assist. Command me."

And "Command us!" came from each of the mighty presences that shrouded the Venusian hills.

"I am gratified," the Leader said. "Follow my example. Gather energy until you can contain no more."

And a strange phenomenon was seen from Earth, one more frightening happening to add to those that already accompanied the steady breakdown of the wildly flaring sun. The sunside of Venus suddenly became dark, reflecting no light, for the widespread bodies of the great galactic beings absorbed it all. For many minutes the planet remained almost invisible, as though a cloud had passed over it. Then it began to glow again, faintly, as the beings finally became filled.

There was no heat, no light in the focused, welded cone of force that was directed against Mercury. The little planet was beginning to disintegrate in the terrible intensity of the sun's rays. But still it swung unchecked in its orbit. The force from Venus was exerted against it slowly, an inexorable inertia, and its already malleable sunside began to flatten from the drag on its orbital speed. Steadily, irresistibly, the pressure continued. Gradually the velocity of the planet slowed.

"We are exhausted," the Leader projected. "If we absorb once more, our task will be done."

So once again Venus darkened. Once again the energy reservoirs of the great galactic beings filled to capacity. And once again the grim, relentless resistance slowed the speed of Mercury in its path around the sun. Finally the critical velocity was reached. The planet wavered, then sagged in its course. Another force seized it, grappled it. It was the attraction of mass for mass, the gravity pull of the sun.

"Now," the Leader directed, "we will assist the attraction of the star."

The pressure was shifted and

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applied to the dark side of Mercury, pushing it with inevitable purpose toward the glowing atomic furnace that perhaps had spawned it. More and more swiftly it plunged, downward, inward. With incredible speed it crossed the distance between its orbit and its primary. As though they could see it coming from afar off, great waves of huge fiery prominences reached deep into space, wrapped themselves around it, gathered it in, and subsided. Mercury was gone.

Jason stirred. His body lay crumpled awkwardly on the car seat, and his neck ached, for his head had slipped sidewise from the backrest as he slept. He sat erect and shook his head with bewilderment. In the other seat Sally still slumbered sweetly. Her fingers, soft and warm, still clung to his. He gently released them. She stirred, murmured, and a half smile touched her lips as she settled back and resumed her peaceful breathing.

"Figures, I guess. The body will take just so much tension, then it quits. We goofed off just sitting here."

Jason stretched his muscular legs, raised his arms high above his head. He was rested, alert, but his body felt cramped, as though he had lain long in one position. Then he realized that the light was different.

"Hey, sleepyhead! Snap out of it! I've got to get you home before the sheriff finds us. Just because the world is coming to an end is no excuse for keeping a lady out all night. Your parents will be wild. They'll think you're dead."

"Wha — what?"

The girl sat up, blinking, then smiled as she oriented herself. "Don't talk to me when I'm asleep. It's distrubing. But it wasn't polite of me to doze off while you *were* talking. I'm sorry, Jason. I was tired. I didn't mean to go away."

"We've both been asleep," Jason said, "and a long time, too. Look where the sun is, girl."

"I'm just glad it still is. I can face it now, Jason. Like the professor says, I can go with dignity."

"Not what I mean," Jason insisted. "Something funny here. See, the sun is behind us. We've been asleep for most of a day and a whole night."

The roiled and reddened sun was just climbing into view above a notch in the mountains to the east. It was morning sunlight that lay on the water, still tipping the waves with orange, but seeming somehow less bloody than it had shown when it tilted in from the west. And the waves were quieter. It was certainly morning, and a more peaceful morning than recent ones had been.

"We can't have." Sally looked

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unbelievingly at the position of the sun, even as she yawned. "That's incredible. Could it be the radiation affecting us? I don't feel badly. In fact, I feel wonderful. Jason, I'm hungry!"

Jason looked at her fondly and resisted the urge to pat her on her curly head as though she were a small child.

"You often are. But this time I think you have extra good reason. Sally, something has happened to us. It may well be that it has happened to everybody. It may be a stage in the final weeks or even days of life on this planet. But, like you say, I don't feel badly. I don't feel hurt. I feel — well, I admit it. I feel hungry too!"

He turned the switch, started the motor.

"I'll take you home. If we can explain where we've been, and why, maybe you'll be allowed to invite me to stay and eat!"

It was a miracle. Large segments of the populations all over the world felt sure of it. For slowly the angry light went out of the sun's rays. Gradually the violent and unpredictable weathers quieted, stabilized became predictable again. The panic that had gripped the people everywhere subsided. Some were even angry that such a false alarm could have been sold so completely to the world.

But to most the feeling was of almost unbelieving relief, of gratefulness for life, no matter how or why the reprieve had come. And each gave thanks in his own way.

It was the heyday of the news media. Never again would they have stories of the impact of the ones during the days when the sun was dying. Now they were explaining why it had not died. They had eager help. Authorities multiplied. Everyone wanted to be heard. But it was many days before the authority the people wanted, the man who had diagnosed the sun's illness and prescribed its cure, would speak. But speak he did finally.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is a special broadcast.

"For weeks attempts have been made to get a word, a reaction, any statement at all, from Professor Goodwin. The word from his observatory has been the same each time. 'When the professor has something to communicate, something that he thinks would be helpful to make public, he will do it. So far, he has nothing to say.'

"But today, at last, he has spoken. Not in person, of course. He has not appeared to the press, has not allowed our cameras to see him. But he has taped a statement and authorized that it be supplied to any media that would want it. You may be sure that it is being played and transcribed all over the

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world at this hour. Ladies and gentlemen, here is Professor Anthony Goodwin, who first detected the breakdown of the sun, who proposed a theoretical remedy and who, like you and me, lived to see it miraculously applied."

The tape whirred softly for a moment, and then the now familiar voice of the old astronomer began:

"My friends across the world: When last I spoke to you, I said good-bye. I meant it. I did not believe, I could not conveive, that anything could halt the progressive deterioration of our life source. By every test and measurement the sun was surely doomed, and in those hours, finally, my compatriots agreed with me.

"It didn't happen. Now, by those same tests, measurements and observations, it seems plain that it isn't going to happen. The sun's radiations have decreased, modified, stabilized. The surface of our planet is cooling. Our ozone shield is almost normal again. And, most definitive of all, sunspots have returned to the surface of the sun, positive indication that energy cycling, release and recovery, is again being established. They are not the sunspot patterns we have known. Those are gone. But I predict that the new ones will behave in the same fashion and will serve the same purposes.

"We know what happened. Our cameras saw it, recorded every phase of it. It was an occurrence so unprecedented, so unexpected, that it could not have been predicted. It is not what logically should have happened. I have studied the films, I have examined the data, again and again and again. I suspect that I will devote what is left of my life to an attempt to explain it.

"But this I will insist, now and as long as I have breath: It was an explainable occurrence. There was a reason for it, a good, solid physical reason. I repudiate all the semihysterical nonsense about Divine Intervention, and well-meant contrived stories about Goodwin's Miracle. I seem to remember that I once stated that miracles were no part of the thinking of a physical scientist. In the universe that I inhabit, at least, cause and effect still account for every happening. So many times we cannot detect the cause. That does not mean it doesn't exist. It means, simply enough, that we have not yet learned to discover and recognize it.

"The Solar System has lost a planet. It certainly served a purpose, and I must watch my speech, lest I imply that that was its reason for existing. Mercury is gone, and *something* slowed it in orbit and, apparently, even *helped* it to fall into the sun. It provided the mass I hypothesized, and it stabilized our star. These things we know. And

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there is a missing factor, something for which the search will be hard, for we don't know its nature. But it is a part of the picture, it is physical and it exists.

"So please, friends, no more Goodwin's Miracle. If it will content you, I will believe in fairies with you, so long as they confine themselves to their conventional pranks and don't go moving the physical world about. But I will not believe that the incident of Mercury and the rejuvenation of the sun are not explainable phenomena. Whether or not we will ever be able to explain them is another matter. We never may be able to gather the needed data. But I shall try.

"I have one last thought. Weeks ago, when our life prospects were zero, I suggested that each listener to my last words think of the thing he would most like to have done, had the Earth lived. I stated my own choice. Now, the Earth will live, and my choice, surely the most unlikely of all, has come to be. By comparison, yours should be easy of accomplishment. I commend it to you, and I rejoice with you that the opportunity to do it again exists.

"Thank you, people of the new Earth, and good evening."

"The experiment succeeded." Saturn communicated to the still-assembled members of its clone, basking quietly over the entire sunside of Venus. "I am willing to say that I have learned. The concept is a new one. Perhaps, in times to come, the Leader will use it again."

"The Leader is no longer with us," Earth projected. "Again It is asleep. Unless there is other emergency, only the end of the life of the being that It is, will waken It. It is enjoying the near view, the view through the senses of the planet-bound beings called men; the beings that devised experiment."

"The Leader was right," Jupiter said. "Small and limited though they are, they know more than we. The Leader will learn, and we will all profit."

"Now we may return to our posts," Neptune said. "I can only say that I am pleased. Mine is a post that has been most satisfying."

"I no longer have a post," Mercury said. "The Leader did not communicate. Should I blend with one of you?"

"Take the sunside of my planet," Pluto offered. "I have no great interest in the system. To me, it is simply a location. I have always preferred to contemplate the Void, the space between suns."

"I will enjoy it," Mercury said. "The perspective will be better, and I will have relief from much radiation. Is this the will of all?"

"Agreed."

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"Then let us leave Venus to its post," Mars said. "And while we watch we can also contemplate experiment. When the Leader wakes, perhaps we may suggest another one."

The phone rang, and rang again. Sleepily, Jason reached out a hand, picked it up and mumbled.

"Jason," said Sally's light voice in his ear, "are you awake?"

"I am now."

"Jason, did you hear the professor's little speech last night?"

"I heard it. Did you wake me up to ask me that?"

"Yes, I did. Jason, there is only one time to do the things we want to do. The time is today. Now. And I want to be married today."

"Good." Jason was finally awake. His lips curved into a fond grin. Through the window the morning sunlight shone yellow on his bedroom wall. "Do you have any prospects?"

"I think I have. There are things we have to do, like getting a license and other silly stuff. I want you to come right over."

"Before breakfast?"

"I'll give you an hour. By then I'll be all ready."

"I'll pick you up," said Jason.

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Bending the Facts?

Two things strike me as curious about Alexei and Cory Panshin's review of my anthology *Science Fiction of the Thirties* (*F&SF*, July). The Panshins say that unlike Isaac Asimov, who picked the stories he loved as a child, I chose mine for didactic or trendy reasons: "His stories are those that demonstrate stock SF ideas for the first time or which anticipate later and superior stories. Or they are stories which seem to prevision the science or the facts of today. There are stories here of star voyagers bollixed by the time contraction paradox, stories of bee language and mammals breathing water, stories of energy crisis and urban disorder."

First, this proposition is false, although the Panshins could not know it, since they did not ask me and their attempt at mind-reading was a failure. Among the eighteen stories in *Science Fiction of the Thirties*, three are things I had forgotten until I reread them in 1974. Every other one is a cherished favorite which I have remembered vividly for forty years.

Second, of the five trendy stories the Panshins list, two are not in the book. The nearest I come to "energy crisis" is a new energy *source*; the only "urban disorder" is a riotous traffic jam caused by a force field. The Panshins, convinced that I have lost my sense of wonder and that I am out to pollute the precious bodily fluids of science fiction, seem willing to bend the facts to fit their thesis.

Damon Knight

Alex Panshin, in his review of *Science-Fiction Handbook, Revised* (F&SF, July 1976) has made inaccurate statements about my writing. He says that the original *Science-Fiction Handbook* of 1953 was my "farewell to science fiction writing" and that I "ceased to write science fiction twenty years ago."

Science-Fiction Handbook was finished February 5, 1953, and published the following September. Since then, I have written and sold 27 science-fiction and fantasy stories totaling 408,200 words and collaborated on 22 more totaling 337,000 words. (I do not count editings, reprints, collections, &c.) Half a dozen of these stories are in press, and another half-dozen or more, not included in the above totals, are in various stages of completion and submission.

Mr. Panshin is right to the extent that, since "Aristotle and the Gun" (written 1956, published 1958) I have written little science fiction *sensu stricto* — perhaps three or four stories, including a novel just sold. The rest of those tabulated are fantasies, most of the collaborations being Conan stories. Also, much of my time in the last 20 years has been given to non-fiction, historical novels, and miscellaneous writings.

But *Science-Fiction Handbook* bore the subtitle *The Writing of Imaginative Fiction;* and *SFR Revised*, that of *A Guide To Writing Imaginative Literature*. In text and chapter titles, I made it as plain as I could that the "science fiction" of the title was a synecdoche for "imaginative fiction" or "science fiction and fantasy." Choice of title was dictated by commercial exigencies.

It is not for me to argue the merits of these stories or of the book reviewed by Mr. Panshin. A reviewer, however,

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owes it to his readers and his reviewee to get his facts straight.

L. Sprague de Camp

Most Loathed SF Writer

The September issue of your magazine contained a book review column by Barry Malzberg which has troubled me since I read it. I am a "larval" sf writer myself, which may account for some of the irritation it has caused. First a caveat.

When Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* appeared on the local wire racks, all I knew was what I could see: a new book. I bought, read and enjoyed it. There had been no warning that I was in danger of being marked for life. Despite what seems to be the general opinion of the book, I haven't been.

Enough caveat. Mr. Malzberg's article allegedly sets out to review Mr. Delany's *Triton*, but quickly degenerates to a post mortem of Delany/*Dhalgren*. That in itself seems a bit unfair. Some of the statements that Mr. Malzberg makes in doing it seem even more so. Such as the claim that Delany has "Absolutely corrupted his audience and with it the chance that many of us might have had to reach a half a million (instead of fifty thousand) with ambitious work which at least tried to extend the common definitions of the field." I'd like to know how those numbers were arrived at, but more importantly I'd like to know just how Delany has thwarted Malzberg's attempts to do ambitious work. Not to mention corrupting half a million people.

Mr. Malzberg's books are on the shelves where I buy books. So are Mr. Delany's. Nearby one finds Edgar Rice Burroughs and "Perry Rhodan" which probably outsell Mr. M & Mr. D put together. But Mr. Malzberg seems to by saying that there is a conspiracy to glamorize Delany at the expense of Malzberg. I hadn't noticed. If anything, I feel a little sorry for Mr. Delany. How long will it be before he will have a book reviewed sans obligatory rap on the knuckles for *Dhalgren?*

As an aspiring writer, Mr. Malzberg's attitudes bother me. He complains — not in exact words — of the sf ghetto. (From here it looks more like a restricted country club.) Paradoxically, he is anguished that a sf writer has breached the walls. I suspect his anguish stems from the fact that it wasn't Barry Malzberg who did it. Personal tastes aside, I can't agree with his argument that a successful *Dhalgren* undermines everybody else. Mr. Malzberg has written many books. I assume he was trying to do his best with all of them. I guess my real question is: If he's done the best he can, and has any confidence at all in the merits of his own work, why should he feel so threatened by a temporary cult-figure? Could it be a lack of confidence? Does he want reassurance that what he thought was good work really is? That would be terribly sad. For most writers, that reassurance never comes. Not from someone else, anyway.

I would also quarrel with Mr. Malzberg's glorification of a 7-year-old book by Ballard, but it seems to be merely the counterpoint to his vilification of Delany. From Satanic to Messianic in one column/article. J.G. Ballard sees fit to drop such impedimenta as characters and plot ("writing ...as much a leaving out as putting in.") and is therefore or thereby one of the elite. "...perhaps the major figure in western literature of our time." Trouble is "our time" in the case of the book reviewed is the late 60's.

Mr. Ballard's appeal to Mr. Malzberg (aside from being painful) seems

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to be that he "may be the only 'science fiction' writer alive more loathed within the confines of the genre than your faithful undersigned." No, not yet. And if Mr. Malzberg will just keep up the high level of self-pity established in this book review article, he can be sure of my vote.

Ron Nance

On Female Leads

"Look! What's that in the mailbox?"

"It's *Argosy!*"

"It's *Field and Stream!*"

"Would you believe *Fantasy and Science Fiction?*"

After "A Stillness at Sordera" (Thayer Waldo, March issue) I held my tongue, but you added "He" (Alan Dean Foster, June issue) and I can remain silent no longer.

In the former story, when I read, "Kathleen was no hysterical idiot, but she was a sensitive wench, alone and vulnerable..." and, "Kathleen stood quietly at the rim, a woman whole enough to accept her natural role." and, "I must confess to being...fonder of that bright, unfailingly articulate dear girl, now that I don't have to listen to her." I thought perhaps this was an early humorous entry in Competition 13, the "myopic early sf or utopian novel," but with "He" I began to doubt.

Are most of your readers myopic early sf or utopian readers who have not realized it's now 1976, not 1906? I do not have to be a female sf reader to be annoyed with the characterization of the lead female (the only female) in "He," nor do I find big fish stories annoying simply because I'm under 30. If I wanted to read *Jaws*, I'd have bought *Jaws*.

Or *Field and Stream*.

Eric C. Wolf

A Boy and His *Sheep* Dog

The Baird Searles review of A BOY AND HIS DOG reveals quite a lot more about the reviewer than it does about the film. All too many times Mr. Searles reveals that he did not watch the screen often enough to even get the story right.

Items: the dog actor was an English sheep dog and, though no breed was mentioned in the film, it was obviously no poodle; the girl was named named Quilla June but then maybe Mr. Searles knows someone named Quilla Jean; Vic frightened off the roverpak by pretending there was a "screamer" nearby and the real one appeared later in the film; the descent into Downunder was filmed in an inactive missile silo, not inside Hoover Dam; the sky was not blue since all the scenes Downunder were night shots and under artificial lighting; Vic and Blood did not go off into the *sunset* together, but rather into the *sunrise*, Vic having returned to the surface at night. Those items, only to name a few, prove conclusively that Mr. Searles assumes facts about films without doing any homework and is more attentive to his typewriter than to his subject.

To go on, Mr. Searles' barely subcutaneous analysis scarcely hides his own dislike for anything of Ellisonian origin. This is quite clearly revealed by the remark that "production values are modest and perfectly suited to the story." Although Mr. Searles professes not to have read the prose version, it is the case that seeing the film is very much like having read the story. Here it becomes quite pointable that the texture of the review was based totally on taste without digestion.

To end this, I must say that how else could the dog-man dialogue have been expressed? I would suggest Smell-O-

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Vision, but it is obvious that only dogs would have known what was being "said." Lastly, he claims that only the dog saves the film, using logic parallel to this: "Only the wondrous presence of the American prisoners enlivens and keeps STALAG 17 from being totally pedestrian."

Russell L. Bates

Mystery of ancient classified revealed

In the "Personal" section of the F&SF Marketplace, in the September 1976 issue, there appeared a very short, cryptic message: "The writer is working near the water, but is lost without her cereal that smiles."

To satisfy the curiosities of F&SF readers who might be wondering about it, after literal minutes of laborious deciphering, I have translated the puzzling message — and revealed its true meaning.

First, I broke the original sentence into smaller parts. "The writer," says the first part — not "The author." Hence, the person in question is undoubtedly the late *Jim Lipschorken*, who wrote many stories, but got none published. "...is working near the water..." How near the water? Since Jim was once a *busboy* in a hotel with a swimming pool, the answer is apparent. "... but is lost..." Confusion reigns; the mob swoons; somebody finds himself. Hence, it is clearly: *toasting*. "...without her..." Since Jim was male, and his mother's name was *not* Dorothy, *Dorothy* is the answer. "...cereal that smiles..." It must be a cereal which gives you pep — that Get-Up-And-Go feeling. Hence, *Bran Flakes!*

Now we have: *Jim Lipschorken is a busbuy toasting Dorothy's Bran Flakes.* The message must next be reversed, to search for palindromes: "Sekalfnarb-syhtorodgnitsaotyobsubasinekrohcs-pilmij," which should be puntuated thus: "Sekal fnarbs, yhtor odgni! Tsaot yobsubas inek ro, hcspilm ifj!"

According to *Sawyers' Interesting Penal Dances*, "Sekal fnarbs" is a war-cry used by the indians of Southern Bolosorova, meaning: "'Dog in wig-wam." "Yhtor odgni" is the sound made in the throat of a cornered Vaglamosk. The last complete sentence is repeated in the *Seven Cryptical Limericks of Nooki-Hoi*, and means: "Harzib, Harzib — put the camel to bed."

Now we have: *Dog in wig-wam — grunt! Harzib, Harzib — put the camel to bed!* Reducing the letters to their numerical equivalents gives us a new sum. When divided by the Number of Bob, we get "30771545111892."

Using *The Warst Official Number-Code Translation Book*, we find that the hidden message means, roughly "Sol: You left your socks at my place. Herbie."

I hope you're satisfied.

Marc Laidlaw

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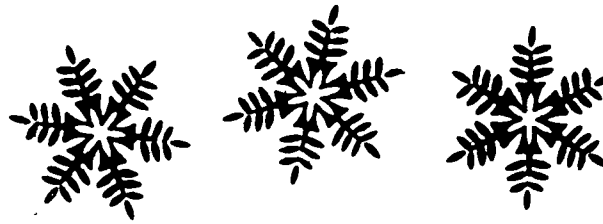

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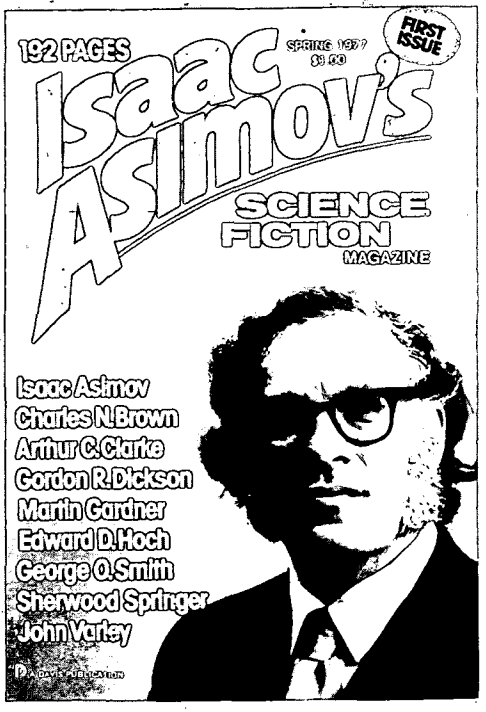

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